

Kitchen Sync Realism

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A hearth with a crackling fire positioned behind glass screens with tiny grids is interrupted every so often by the static of television snow. It mimics the heavy snowfall outside the glass screen of our window, without notice that one causes the other. This was the Yule Log channel, a T.V. programme that looped a commercial-free video of an ornate fireplace every December, available to every household in my part of Canada. It wasn't much relief from the - 30°C weather, but I never felt cold then, at least not in memory.

I'm always cold now, circulation getting worse with age and body forgetting to spread its heat evenly. This is most noticeable at the end of my menstrual cycle, when I am left aching and frozen, limbs like icicles weighing me down, body screaming to expel the lack I've produced. I sleep next to him and he's always a furnace, burning blissfully hot. He wraps himself around me, but even under heavy blankets trapping in his body heat, my body refuses to warm up. And so I sleep in the cold.

As I grow older, my menstrual cycle begins to regulate more and more, conforming to those 28 days that teen magazines and horror flicks have always told me about. The onset of cold comes right on schedule every four weeks. There's been a lot less pregnancy scares as I grow older, and not just for the declining frequency of sex. My body craves stability, knows that the future only holds decay, knows that the rhythm of return is its only renewal.

The fireplace channel obeyed by a rhythm stricter than my body's. Its yearly reappearance corresponded with the commercial calendar, which corresponds with the Gregorian calendar, right at the same time shopping malls would start playing unceasing amounts of Christmas music and shopfronts would be decked with boughs of holly. That was years ago; now, no one watches cable television anymore, and no one shops at malls anymore, both replaced instead with the screens in our pockets and on our laps. You can still access that same nostalgia on several channels throughout the internet, but it's not the same. In its initiation, it was meant as a sort of gathering-across-space, uniting families from disparate corners of the network with the same video fire. Now, everyone has fallen out of sync.

The whole idea of people switching on the television to see the representation of a fireplace to experience certain connectivity has so many implications about the hyperreal that it could give even Baudrillard simulated wet dreams. But I'll just say this: The television fireplace was a strange symptom of a time caught between two eras - a time that is at once looking back with nostalgia at a past that had yet to segment labour into its component parts, domestic or otherwise, and looking forward to a time when we have collectively given in to virtuality. Angelus Novus might be staring backwards into the hellish abyss of what has already surpassed, but the universe has two faces.

The future being gazed upon doesn't care for the real. Or maybe it's found a different relation to it. It cares about 300 dpi and 1080p and framerate, about mimicking a thing in the world well

enough to trick itself into thinking it's real. This imagined past could only conjure up the real, reproducing function and form that conformed to function. In this past, fireplaces and wood burning was once a necessary component to daily life, a function that kept warmth and dictated the rhythm of life.

In the study, *Stacking wood and staying warm: Time, temporality and housework around domestic heating systems*¹, we're told that for the sake of thermal comfort, "clothing, housing and the natural environment form an integrated practical unity against which the human body is negotiated" and that the technical components involved in a manual fireplace sets the rhythms of a domestic life to which the body conforms. The study describes two types of synchronicity that owe themselves to social studies. The first accounts for the threads of events in different chronological sequences, as in the way harvesting firewood requires the synchronisation of the weather, several labourers, the workings of machinery and so on. The second, dubbed "mundane synchronisation", refers to the overlapping rather than the mastering of sequences. Multitasking, if you will, but not in an orchestrated sense. Doing a few dishes as the coffee is brewing alleviates some of the stress that domestic work imbues. In relation to firewood, it means the routinisation of tasks, coordinated so as to allow the technical fall into the background, convenient but not invisible, setting the rhythm by the necessity of warmth.

But we've fallen out of these synchronicities into another, wholly different one. There is no more stoking the fire, waiting for a home to heat up before leaving on vacation for fear of bursting pipes, no heating the furnace as a precursor to a functional kitchen. Automation and the instantaneity of digital processes have all but erased the metronome of daily life. Now, these synchronicities are purely fabricated coincidences. I write him a message on Whatsapp, and four hours later it's read. The message transmits instantly, yet the contrived delay between sender and receiver recognises the lack of need (want?) for synchronicity. We don't need to be in the same place, and now we don't need to be in the same time. Overlap is not required to forge a connection in this flattened temporality. We need only to swipe right at some point in our lives and hope that the algorithms take care of the rest. An entire generation of Tinder babies owes their lives to the digitisation of romantic encounters, this new un-synchronicity of algorithmically generated results powered by the libidinal forces of two.

Time doesn't exist in the way of duration, or container, or dimension. It is only start and pause, only rhythm and synchronicity, infinite return, fractal. My body has fallen into sync with its own rhythms, and out of sync from the rest of the world. My warmth is my own, not borrowed from him or burning wood or television sets. My body hums away on its own, serenading a single frigid tune. A profound loneliness grips the cold room as I stare at the wispy locks falling over his delicately closed eyelids, small jerks bubbling from his REM cycle. I press against him but we remain two, separated by infinitesimal space. The valences of our molecules can never touch, can only meld into one another in some cosmic fusion when the sun expands into the atmosphere, a blissful hydrogen-drenched apocalypse. It's not just space that separates us, but time. Our lack of synchronicity churns on from different heart rates set to different tempos set

¹ Jalas, Mikko, and Jenny Rinkinen. "Stacking Wood and Staying Warm: Time, Temporality and Housework around Domestic Heating Systems." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2013, pp. 43–60., doi:10.1177/1469540513509639.

to different lifespans and clicks and messages being received and opened and replied to. Instantaneity erodes spontaneity, offers less breadth to arrange mundane synchronicities within.

In resignation, I search “fireplace channel” on YouTube, and my laptop emits a tiny bit of heat as it livestreams a hearth and crackling flame. On the side panel, other visitors of the channel are displaying their pubescent sentiments. Words without bodies can't feel shame or cold weighing them down. I type in something inconsequential with my numb hands, revelling in the immediacy and isolation of this action.