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The Temporal Turn in Social Movement Studies: Political Readings of Temporality

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ABSTRACT

The study of temporality has gained increasing prominence in sociology and social movement studies. As this wave of research on temporality has risen, scholars have increasingly argued that time should not be understood as a neutral backdrop but as a dimension of power and conflict. Building on the concept of the capitalist timescape as a socio-political regime that organises, synchronises, and commodifies time through dynamics of acceleration and permanent crisis, this emerging critical field shows how temporal logics discipline everyday rhythms, compress horizons of political action, and foreclose alternative futures. Fighting against the capitalist temporal order is a battlefield of social movements which do not simply exist in time but act upon it, generating counter-temporalities that reconfigure pasts, presents, and futures. By explicitly bridging the sociology of time and social movement studies, this article shows that the temporal turn cannot be understood without situating social movements within broader socio-political regimes of temporality. Recent scholarship has articulated this “temporal turn” in Social Movement Studies, highlighting how social movements mobilise concepts such as critical junctures, memory, rhythm, anticipation, and prefiguration to contest the capitalist timescape. While contributions have multiplied in recent years, they remain fragmented across these different strands. This article provides an analytical overview of this literature and calls for a more integrated framework to capture how affective, symbolic, and practical practices of temporal agency intersect. It argues that grasping time politically is crucial to deconstruct the capitalist temporal order, and strengthen the strategies of resistance that emerge against it.

1 | Introduction

Rather than a mere background condition, temporality has become a central focus of the social sciences revealing, how power, organisation, and conflict are structured through time. Time is socially mediated, politically structured, and historically specific; it shapes practices, influences how institutions function, and determines how collective actors relate to the past, present, and future. From the sociology of time to historical materialism and critical theory, scholars across disciplines have shown that socio-economic systems reorganise temporal relations, synchronising rhythms and horizons in line with

regimes of domination. Time is therefore not a neutral backdrop but a politically structured component of social existence, functioning both as an object of organisation and as a means of domination.

In contemporary capitalism these dynamics manifest as acceleration and perpetual crisis, shaping everyday life and political action. Nonetheless, temporality is not simply imposed; it is also contested. Social movements contest crises, interrupt current rhythms, and project alternative futures, creating counter-temporalities that reconfigure horizons of action. From this perspective, time is continually (re)produced, controlled, and

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challenged. Time is institutionalised through the commodification of normative material temporal products such as calendars and clocks (Thompson 1967; Martineau 2015), embedded in labor and governance as well as necropolitics (Mills 2020), articulated through systems of gender and racial domination (Arruzza 2015; Chandra and Chen 2022; Monfort 2024), and experienced in everyday life (Lefebvre 1991; Briales 2022). Temporality thus emerges as a vital terrain for understanding the logics of domination, as well as the possibilities for resistance.

Different traditions have long underscored this point. Marxist theories have conceptualised the invasion of capital into working time as the appropriation of life itself, theorised as “stolen time” (Marx 1991; Bellamy-Foster et al. 2019). They also elaborate capitalism’s temporal domination of social relations and social reproduction (Rey-Araújo 2026). Further, Adam (2005) proposed the notion of ‘timescapes’ to capture the layered, relational character of temporal orders. More recent conceptualisations (Ike 2025) further explain that time is stolen through social relations, the sex-gender system, and other intersectional domination mechanisms deconstructed by Black temporality and circular or indigenous temporalities which have expanded the lexicon and conceptual breadth of the field, underscoring how power operates through the organisation of time.

Within Social Movement Studies, recent work focussing on temporality has been shaping the scholarship which has conceptualised eventful temporality (Sewell 1996; McAdam et al. 2001), critical junctures (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; della Porta 2018), and intense times (della Porta 2025). These ideas highlight how extraordinary moments destabilise routines, compress horizons, and amplify agency for social actors and movements. Notes the necessity of theorising time as a dimension of power and politics to understand time as for any other invisible system of oppression.

Temporality is one means through which capitalist domination is exercised and contested. It requires paying close attention to how time is structured, by whom, for what purposes, and with what consequences. This also illustrates a need for research on how social movements actively intervene and use temporality within and for their political struggles, on the other side of the fight against capitalist domination. Scholarship on temporality has accrued in studies both on the sociology of time and of social movements, albeit in parallel. Research on the sociology of time tends to focus on macro-level temporal regimes, whereas temporality in social movements often narrows on events, memory, anticipation, or protest cycles. This article seeks to connect these strands by situating the temporal turn in social movement studies within broader socio-political regimes of temporality.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses key contributions from the sociology of time and critical theory, introducing the idea of the capitalist timescape, its emerging dynamics, and its form of temporal control. Section 3 analyses how this temporal regime generates contradictions that social movements encounter by introducing the concept of movement timescapes. Section 4 examines social movement studies, tracing

the shift from the traditional view of time as background to the recent temporal turn. The conclusion highlights the importance of an integrated approach to understanding temporality in social movements and reflects on the analytical potential of examining time as a political factor in contentious politics.

2 | The Sociology of Time and the Capitalist Timescape

This section situates my argument within the fields of the sociology of time and critical theory, outlining how temporality functions as a socio-political dimension of domination and conflict. In doing so, I provide the analytical grounding to connect macro-level temporal structures to the meso-level practices through which collective actors engage with and contest those structures. The following sections will elaborate on that latter point.

2.1 | The Capitalist Timescape as a Regime of Power and Conflict

Social sciences scholarship has emphasised that temporality is socially mediated, politically structured, and historically specific (Adam 1990, 2005, 2006; Marx 1991; Thompson 1967). The rhythms of everyday practices, the horizons of political projects and the sequences of historical change are all shaped through temporal logics that are socially reproduced, politically contested, and strategically deployed. To grasp the political significance of temporality is to recognise that struggles over time are inseparable from struggles over domination and emancipation.

Marxist traditions have long emphasised that capitalism is fundamentally organised through time. Marx himself (1991) conceptualised labor-time as the substance and measure of value: the capitalist accumulation therein rests on the commodification and subsumption of human and natural time. Ecological Marxist writings have further argued that capitalist accumulation also destabilises ecological and reproductive cycles, generating metabolic and temporal rifts between the rhythms of capital accumulation and those of nature (Foster 1999; Saito 2017, 2023; Rey-Araújo 2024). The systematic study of time within sociology moved beyond temporality as merely technical or linear. Sorokin and Merton’s (1937) pioneering study highlighted that calendars and clocks are institutionalised devices for coordination. Thompson’s (1967) celebrated analysis of time-discipline in early industrial capitalism further demonstrated how the factory clock transformed patterns of labor and life, embedding punctuality, productivity, and discipline as central values of modern society. Postone (1993) accordingly arguing that capitalism is unique in being a temporally mediated form of social life, where time itself becomes the basis of value and domination. More recently, Wajcman (2016) demonstrated how the perceived “speeding up” of everyday life is intricately linked to emerging technologies, labor relations, and gendered expectations.

Moreover, Hochschild’s analyses (1989, 1997) show how the temporal domination of capitalist labor regimes reshapes domestic life, producing new tensions between paid and care work. She demonstrates that capitalist temporal regimes are structured through gendered divisions of labor and the

management of everyday time. Temporal domination operates not only through labor-time extraction but also through the organisation of reproductive and affective work. Recent work further emphasises that capitalist reproduction articulates heterogeneous temporal rhythms such as natural, social, and economic across multiple scales, from daily and weekly cycles of labor and care to longer economic cycles and waves of accumulation (Rey-Araújo 2026).

Adam's (1990) concept of timescapes captures the layered and relational nature of temporal orders as constituted by ecological rhythms and biological and social structures. Importantly, Adam (2005) emphasised that "each historical epoch, with its own forms of socio-economic expression, simultaneously restructures its social relations of time". Referring to the complex temporal architecture of social life, encompassing dimensions such as tempo, timing, sequence, duration, and synchronisation, the notion of timescapes highlights how different temporal rhythms and scales interact within specific social and historical systems of domination. Recent scholarship has revived and expanded these traditions. Martineau (2015) argued that social relations reproduce temporal hierarchies and asymmetries, so inequalities manifest not only in space and resources but also in time. Gökemnoğlu and Manley (2023) similarly insists that time must be understood as a mechanism of social control, a field of struggle, and a material terrain of power.

Taken together, these perspectives highlight that temporal regimes are neither stable nor neutral but actively structured through relations of power, producing tensions, asymmetries, and moments of disruption. Building on this perspective, this article understands the notion of a capitalist timescape to emphasise a socio-political regime that organises, synchronises, disciplines, and appropriates time according to the imperatives of capital, its crisis management, and political governance. In this sense, the term highlights the current historical conjuncture and specific ways in which capitalist dynamics structure both the organisation and experience of social time aiming to capture the structural, dynamic, and conflictual dimensions of capitalist temporality. It denotes a socio-political regime that organises, synchronises, disciplines, and appropriates time according to the imperatives of capital. First, the term 'capitalist timescapes' highlights that time is a dimension of power that shapes social relations and hierarchies (Martineau 2015; Tombazos 2013). Second, it stresses the commodification of time itself, subjecting diverse rhythms: natural, biological, social, and subjective (Adam 1990) to a homogenised order. Third, it emphasises that temporality is fluid and conflictual, generating tensions that disrupt hegemonic synchronisation and open avenues for contestation.

In this paper I advance a definition of the capitalist timescape as a socio-political structure that subordinates various temporalities to a linear and homogenised logic centered on the reproductive and accumulative needs of capital. Temporality is not static but a contested terrain where domination and emancipation intersect. As Benjamin (1940) argued, history unfolds not as an empty continuum but as a battlefield of temporal claims, where revolutionary interventions disrupt the apparent linearity of capitalist time. This perspective highlights the importance of treating temporality as a field of contention, one that structures life, reproduces inequalities, and shapes political

possibilities. The following section examines the specific dynamics through which this regime manifests today: acceleration and permanent crisis.

2.2 | Capitalist Temporality and Its Emerging Dynamics

Contemporary capitalism appears increasingly contradictory and unstable as processes of acceleration, crisis and intensified conjunctures reshape social and political rhythms. While capitalist temporal regimes seek to synchronise social life around the imperatives of accumulation, they simultaneously generate fragmentation and instability. Several interrelated processes contribute to this configuration. First, the linearisation of time reduces temporality to a forward-moving trajectory centered on growth, productivity and progress, marginalising cyclical or plural temporalities (Adam 2005; Lefebvre 2004). Second, processes of temporal compression accelerate economic, social and political rhythms, shortening horizons and intensifying pressures for rapid adaptation (Rosa 2013). Third, capitalist organisation commodifies time extracting and optimising it through regimes of labor and social reproduction (Thompson 1967; Martineau 2015), colonising lived temporal experiences (Rifkin 2017; Whyte 2017). Together, these dynamics produce a temporal configuration marked by acceleration and crisis, reshaping both everyday life and the horizons of political action.

One of the most influential diagnoses of contemporary capitalist temporality is Rosa's (2013) theory of social acceleration. It argues that modern societies experience acceleration across three interrelated dimensions: technological acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and the intensification of the pace of everyday life. These processes compress temporal horizons and increase pressures for rapid adaptation, producing growing desynchronisation between spheres such as politics, economy, technology and everyday life. Rosa describes this condition as a "frenetic standstill," where continuous acceleration paradoxically produces a sense of stagnation and blocked futures. From this perspective, acceleration does not simply increase the speed of social life; it reorganises temporal expectations, shortens planning horizons and reshapes the conditions under which collective action becomes possible.

Alongside acceleration, a growing body of scholarship highlights the increasing centrality of permanent crisis within contemporary capitalism. Rather than appearing as exceptional, crises increasingly function as recurring structural conditions that shape political life. Authors like Fisher 2009; Berardi and et al. 2019; Tomba 2012, 2013 argue that late capitalism is characterised by a persistent sense of instability in which financial crises, austerity cycles, wars and genocides, and ecological catastrophe become normalised features of social life. In this context, as horizons of stability shrink and uncertainty becomes pervasive, the present appears increasingly saturated with urgency, while the future is experienced as precarious, foreclosed or difficult to imagine. These dynamics of acceleration and crisis also transform the temporal structure of political action. More recently, della Porta (2025) theorised this conjuncture through the concept of intense times. Periods of "quiet times," during which routines dominate and change unfolds slowly, are becoming increasingly rare. Instead, actors

face intense conjunctures characterised by low predictability, rapid change and heightened subjectivity. In these contexts, political processes unfold within compressed temporal horizons, requiring rapid responses to volatile and uncertain conditions. Taken together, these dynamics affirm that temporality in contemporary capitalism is not merely a background condition but a terrain of political conflict. Processes of acceleration, recurrent crisis and intensified conjunctures reshape temporal horizons, producing tensions between the rhythms imposed by capitalism and the possibilities for alternative temporal arrangements. Under these conditions, struggles over time become increasingly central to social and political life, seeking to intervene in it, challenging dominant rhythms, rearticulating past experiences and projecting alternative futures.

3 | From the Capitalist Timescape to Movement Timescapes: Contention Over Timescapes

Since capitalist temporality constitutes a totalising system, social movements cannot be seen as external or merely adjacent to it. They emerge from within this temporal regime, inhabiting its contradictions while seeking to contest them. The capitalist timescape thus operates simultaneously as a field of constraint and of possibility. Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasised the temporal dimension of collective action. This scholarship has centered emotions (Chamberlain 2017; Knops 2023), narratives (Polletta 2006; Tavori and Eliasoph 2013; de Moor and Wahlström 2019) and tactics and repertoires (Doherty et al. 2018; Jaster 2019; Wood 2024) as key areas where time is actively politicised. This perspective resonates with the notion of time-work, which highlights how movements actively reconfigure temporal conditions and agency rather than passively adapting to them.

The concept of movement timescapes (Gillan 2018) provides a helpful lens. It can be understood as the “metaphorical placeholder for the socio-political environment in which social movements operate”. Temporal actors materialise affective and discursive practices to confront capitalist temporality. We can already observe some examples of this. When capitalism imposes acceleration, movements may respond with strategies of interruption or deceleration (such as slow food movements, strikes, occupations) that reclaim temporal control. When capitalism generates crisis and uncertainty, movements often develop narratives of continuity, anchoring present struggles within historical legacies or ruptures (like the movements for historical and collective memory) or projecting alternative horizons of future possibilities (like climate movements or prefigurative movements envisioning and practising envisioned futures). This dialectical relation highlights that movement timescapes are not autonomous inventions but insurgent translations of capitalist contradictions.¹ They arise from the same material conditions they contest, and their strength lies in their capacity to reorganise temporal logics and rhythms. In this regard, movements act as laboratories of temporal experimentation: interrupting accelerations, contesting crises, and rearticulating horizons and transformation.

By examining how the capitalist timescape is challenged and reshaped within movement timescapes, my analysis highlights the strategic dimension of temporality within social movements.

4 | Social Movements and Temporality: From Time as Context to Time as Strategy

This section explores how the study of social movements has progressively incorporated temporality into its analytical framework. It traces the shift from classical approaches that regarded time as an external or background factor to modern scholarship that recognises temporality as a dimension of power and strategy. First, it revisits how classical theories engage with time. Then I examine the emergence of the temporal turn, which redefined temporality as a contested and strategic field and conceptualised the temporal agency of social movements. There is a visibly increasing centrality of temporality in the study of contemporary contentious politics.

4.1 | Temporality in Classical Social Movement Theories

Classical approaches in Social Movement Studies rarely center temporality. Instead they treat it instrumentally, either as a factor influencing opportunities for mobilisation or as a chronological pattern of protest activities. In Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) for example, time is mainly understood through the availability and duration of resources that support movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Meanwhile, Political Opportunity Structures (POS) and Political Process Theory (PPT) approach time through “windows of opportunity,” in which movements are expected to emerge depending on institutional openings or elite realignments and alliances, as well as the potential for repression (McAdam and et al. 2013; Tarrow 1998). While opportunities and threats are crucial, temporality itself remains external to movements’ agency.

The study of protest cycles (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1998) explicitly examine the temporality of contention in terms of recurrent mobilisation waves of rise and decline: Periods of heightened conflict followed by abeyance, latency, or institutionalisation. These cycles show the cadence of mobilisation but conceptualise time primarily as a structural pattern to be observed, not as a terrain actively contested by movements. Gokmenoglu (2019) has argued that such models often presuppose the eventual decline of social movements, emphasising their defeat and obscuring their transformative potential.

Classical approaches position time as background rather than as a strategic and resistance dimension. Social movements act within time: seizing openings, adapting to cycles, responding to constraints, rather than acting upon time itself. These theories omit social movements’ own temporalities: rhythms, horizons, and interruptions that intervene in the very organisation of social and political time. This is the gap addressed by the temporal turn.

4.2 | The Temporal Turn and the Dimensions of Temporal Agency in Social Movements

Over the past 2 decades, a growing body of scholarship has reshaped the study of social movements by treating temporality as a fundamental aspect of collective action. This temporal turn has broadened Social Movement Studies beyond the timing of opportunities or the length of protest cycles, foregrounding how movements actively shape, produce and reorganise within and

upon temporality itself (Gillan and Edwards 2020; Gökemnoğlu and Manley 2023). Movements are recognised not only as actors positioned in time but as agents actively reshaping rhythms, horizons, and durations of collective life.

One influential strand is the concept of eventful temporality. Sewell (1996, 2001) emphasises how certain political events interrupt historical continuity, creating ruptures that reshape structures and open opportunities for agency. della Porta (2025) further develops this perspective through the concept of intense times, arguing that under conditions of ongoing crisis, horizons contract and decision-making speeds up, thereby amplifying the subjective density of action. Beyond the facts of when protests or actions happen, they elucidate detailed patterns of the nature of time within movements. This approach shows how horizons can narrow or widen, routines can be paused or resumed, and decision-making can be coordinated amid volatile periods. Essentially, historical events are not just isolated moments; they actively reshape the strategic landscape of temporality.

Nevertheless, moving from continuity and intensity to rupture or routine involves conceptual tools that explain how movements become stabilised within this temporality and actively subvert it. They question how actors against capitalist timescapes transform temporal orders and their dynamics to support their actions. This is exercise of ‘temporal agency’ which, building on Flaherty’s time-work (2020), can be understood as a specification of the sociological notion of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) famously conceptualise agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement that integrates three orientations: the iterative (past), the projective (future), and the practical-evaluative (present). In this sense agency is inherently temporal, as actors draw upon past experiences, evaluate present conditions, and project possible futures. Temporal agency therefore refers to the capacity of collective actors to strategically mobilise temporal dimensions such as memory, rhythm, anticipation, and interruption to shape political action and contest dominant temporal orders.

More recent works have deepened the analysis of temporal agency. The concept of time-work Gökemnoğlu and Manley (2023) argue that activists and movements do not simply mobilise within existing temporal conditions but engage in time-work: “the collective effort to shape narrative and prefigurative orientations to the imagined past, lived present, and anticipated future, for and within political struggle”. They demonstrate that dystopian narratives can be reoriented to create anticipatory orientations, transforming negative emotions into collective energy. Gillan (2018) advances a ‘neoliberal’ timescape to show how social movements respond with counter-temporal landscapes, thereby affecting and reorganising those neoliberal vectors. This work is one of the primary studies in the scholarship that examines the agentic temporality of social movements on an intertwined macro-meso level.

The concept of repertoires of action from Tilly (1978) refers to the set of protest performances that movements learn and deploy in historical context. Repertoires are now being analysed from the temporal perspective of how different forms of action produce specific rhythms of mobilisation. These perspectives invite us to think of repertoires not only as sets of protest

performances but also as practices that organise temporal dynamics of collective action, shaping rhythms of interruption, repetition and endurance. Further contributions focus on the rhythmic dimension of mobilisation. Wagner-Pacifi and Ruggero (2018) propose analysing how movements organise their “strategic rhythms,” between past, present, and future. Repertoires of action can be complemented by temporal perspectives of emotions and narratives (Siročić 2024) and tactics for mobilisation (Wood 2024). Together, these perspectives highlight how temporality shapes not only the opportunities and constraints faced by social movements but also their agency. The temporal turn positions temporality as both a *dispositif* of power and a strategic site of resistance, laying the foundations for more systematic frameworks that explore how movements develop their strategies through temporal agency: by activating memories, intensifying present moments, projecting alternative futures, and maintaining rhythms of struggle that contest the capitalist timescape. Meso-level practices of temporal agency relate to macro-level structures of temporality, turning time from a background object into a field of political struggle.

Research in the temporal turn examines how movements act in the present through tactical practices that disrupt the rhythms of daily life and capitalist (re)production. Strategies and tactics operate as temporal tools that interrupt the “normal” flow of capitalist time, mediating between active pasts, contested presents, and envisioned futures. Suppose the past provides the symbolic energy and resources for mobilisation and the future offers the horizon of aspiration. In that case, the present becomes the battlefield where movements operate, persist, and contest. Following Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythm analysis, movements can be seen as rhythmic interruptions such as strikes, protests, blockades, and occupations, which not only challenge power but also interrupt the hegemonic flow, slow it, or sustain temporal endurance. Protest camps and occupations provide a clear illustration of this temporal dynamic. Studies of the Occupy movement (Wagner-Pacifi and Ruggero 2018) for example, show how encampments generated alternative rhythms of collective life, reorganising daily routines, assemblies, and decision-making processes outside the accelerated tempo of capitalist time. More recently, some authors (Moradi 2024), have been reflecting on how the Palestine Solidarity Encampments disrupted “the veneer of time-space congruence, this frozen moment seeks to rupture the artificial normalcy of everyday life in the late modern, capitalist society”. The strategic use of the present tense here is not limited to disruption. It involves creating temporality: by establishing assemblies, routines, and rituals, social movements build temporal infrastructures that support participation over time. Maeckelbergh (2011) has demonstrated how horizontal and participatory forms of organisation generate alternative temporalities through processes of deliberation, repetition, and iteration. Moreover, tactical engagements in the present enable social movements to pay attention to their participants’ emotional batteries. Sequences of actions help sustain mobilisation beyond peak moments. In this sense, movements generate temporal rhythms that connect daily life to political purpose, synchronising bodies, emotions, and actions in ways that challenge the abstract and commodified time of capital. By producing new rhythms, forms of duration, and embodied practices, social

movements create the conditions for their temporal strategy. Repertoires are redefined not as lists of actions but as rhythm-producing practices that create political durability. The present thus becomes not only the site of contestation but the material process through which movements can construct continuity, rupture, collective time and the field of a political struggle. Methodologically, this suggests shifting from event counts to rhythm analysis, focussing on how, for example, the density and periodicity of collective routines, the duration of occupations and assemblies, and the temporal gaps between disruption and consolidation shape the endurance and coordination of collective action.

Another strand of the temporal turn highlights the role of the past that functions not as a reference or recollection but as an active resource for contemporary struggles. For example, Daphi and Zamponi (2019) propose an analytical distinction between the memories of movements (how movements are remembered), memory in movements (how past recollections are mobilised as strategic resources), and movements about memory (those seeking to reinterpret collective memory). The category of memory in movements is particularly relevant, demonstrating how mnemonic practices support mobilisation through the role of collective memory as a strategic tool for collective action. Research on movements such as Black Lives Matter further illustrates how historical memory operates as a temporal resource. References to the history of racial violence and civil rights struggles connect past injustices to present mobilisation, transforming collective memory into a driver of contemporary political action (Jackson 2021). Studies of mnemonic communities (Romanos 2018; Zamponi 2018) reveal how past struggles are revived to legitimise current actions and strengthen collective identity. Zamponi (2018) documents how student movements were revived through collective memory, thereby reinforcing the movements, their organisation, and their collective identity. Likewise, Romanos (2018) explores the dynamics of continuity and rupture across different protest cycles, notably May '68 and 15M, investigating how they are interconnected through cultural and collective processes. He contends that memory, in terms of organisation, interpretative frameworks, and strategies, acts as a reference for subsequent cycles. Betancor (2024) links the emergence of 15M to latent networks and memories of previous movements, thereby connecting memory and latency as strategic temporal dimensions. As the author explains, involves interpreting the past through a shared collective memory that guides the present and future. These interpretations and studies of memory as a key dimension of temporal agency show that continuity and ruptures are not simply inherited but actively produced through collective engagement with the past. From this perspective, memory operates as a form of temporal agency that organises which past experiences are reactivated, how they are transmitted, and to what end. A third body of work explores futures, examining how movements reshape imaginaries and project and anticipate desired horizons into the present. In recent years, a significant body of scholarship in social movement studies has engaged with the discussion of the future as a goal-oriented aspect of movements. Research on climate movements provide a particularly clear example of this. Scholars analysing climate mobilisation show how narratives around the urgency of ecological

collapse and planetary tipping points reframes the present as a decisive moment requiring immediate collective action, collapsing long-term environmental processes into a pressing temporal horizon (Soler-i-Martí et al. 2024). At the same time, this urgency generates important tensions: as Kenis (2023) notes, the demand to act “now” produces temporal paradoxes, where movements must simultaneously accelerate political action while confronting structural conditions that slow or constrain transformative change.

Memory offers strategic leverage from the past, but imaginaries also serve as a strategic tool for projecting the future: shaping it around desires, needs, and goals. They do this by projecting their envisioned future, whether in the short or long term. Scholars such as Levitas (2013) and Dinerstein (2015) have explored how utopian thinking and anticipatory imaginaries function as resources for collective action, allowing movements to articulate alternative social horizons and orient present practices towards transformative futures. Meanwhile, scholarship on prefigurative politics has been showing how the practices within movements enact their desired future in the present (Maeckelbergh 2011; Monticelli 2024; Yumukov 2025). Analyses of movements and communities such as the Zapatistas (Törnberg 2021) and Rojava (Piccardi and Barca 2022) illustrate this dynamic particularly clearly. Scholars have shown how their autonomous institutions seek to materialise alternative social relations in the present, thereby collapsing the distance between future aspirations and present conjuncture. Moreover, prefiguration fosters embryonic forms of the social relations envisioned for the future (Gorz 1968; Boggs 1977; Yates 2014). Swain (2019) describes prefiguration as collapsing the future into the present. In this sense, movements create alternative institutions and rhythms that serve not only as tactics but as anticipatory structures of transformation (Yates 2015). Rather than treating time as the stage on which mobilisation unfolds, these studies show that movements consciously organise, use, and inhabit temporal structures as part of their strategic practice.

This plural scholarship has made an essential contribution by showing that movements do not merely react to temporal constraints but actively act within them, using temporal elements strategically. However, the temporal turn still tends to treat these dimensions as separate analytical strands rather than as interconnected forms of temporal practice. This fragmentation has analytical consequences, as it tends to isolate specific temporal dimensions: when memory, anticipation, rhythm, latency, or prefiguration are examined in isolation, it becomes difficult to understand how movements coordinate these dimensions into their strategies. Moreover, this fragmentation can limit the capacity to connect meso-level practices with macro-level temporal regimes, obscuring how movements both respond to and reshape broader socio-political temporal orders. Overcoming this fragmentation would therefore allow for a more systematic and totalising understanding of temporality as a strategic field, clarifying how collective actors synchronise past references, present interventions, and future projections into politically strategic configurations. A more integrated perspective would enable us to grasp how movements weave these dimensions into a coherent strategy that both resists and reconfigures the dominant timescape of capitalism.

5 | Toward an Integrated Understanding of Temporality in Social Movements

This article has reviewed the growing body of scholarship that brings temporality to the center of debates on domination and resistance. First, it examined how capitalism constitutes a temporal regime or capitalist timescape that synchronises rhythms, compresses horizons, and organises life through logics of acceleration, and recurrent crisis. Far from being a neutral background, temporality emerges as a dispositive of power that structures social relations and influences the potential for collective action.

Second, the discussion turned to the temporal agency of social movements. Moving beyond classical theories that treated temporality mainly as context, recent research shows how movements actively use and intervene in temporality: disrupting capitalist rhythms through tactical actions, maintaining mobilisation during periods of latency, reactivating collective memories of past struggles, and envisioning future horizons through imaginaries and prefigurative practices. In this sense, movements do not simply exist in time but act upon it, producing insurgent temporalities that challenge the dominant temporal order. At the same time, the literature remains fragmented. Different fields, such as memory, anticipation, rhythm, latency, or coordination of futures, often remain isolated, limiting our understanding of how these temporal dimensions intersect. What is still needed is a more systematic framework capable of capturing how affective, symbolic, and practical practices combine into strategic constellations of temporal agency. Developing such an integrated approach could offer a double promise. Analytically, it would enable a richer understanding of how capitalism organises and reproduces time as form of domination and how movements resist to it. Moreover, it would highlight temporality as a battlefield, where emancipation can be rescued, imagined and enacted. Overcoming the current fragmentation of the temporal turn would require more than synthesising existing strands; it would entail reorienting the analytical focus of research. Conceptually speaking, this implies treating memory, anticipation, emotion, rhythm and repertoires of action not as discrete dimensions but as interrelated modalities of temporal praxis. Rather than asking how movements remember, anticipate or disrupt in isolation, future research could examine how these dimensions are synchronised in concrete processes of mobilisation. Such an approach would involve connecting macro-level temporal regimes with meso-level dimensions tracing how structural temporal pressures are translated into strategic interventions and vice versa. Methodologically, this implies moving beyond event-centered accounts toward problem-centered and temporal sensitive approaches. These should be capable of analysing how dimensions such as orientation, duration, latency, sequence and horizon capture how social movements reference the past, intervene in the present, and project into the future through coherent temporal strategies within broader struggles over social time. Such an approach would allow the temporal turn to mature from a set of parallel insights into a more systematic framework for analysing political time and its struggles.

Therefore, unifying political readings of temporality thus represent not only a scholarly challenge but also a crucial step

for understanding how social movements contest capitalist time and reconfigure collective action. To conclude, this paper highlights the need for a more integrated approach to understanding temporality in social movements, identifying the current fragmentation of the field, and reflecting on the analytical potential of examining time in contentious politics.

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Endnote

¹ When I refer to movements as translations of capitalist contradictions, I want to emphasise that their temporalities are not autonomous or external inventions of capitalism, but rather emerge within it as a response to its own tensions and crises. These contradictions act simultaneously as a condition of possibility and as an object of dispute: the movements rearticulate them in an insurgent key, transforming them into strategic orientations and emancipatory horizons.

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