

# ‘View from the window’: On time, politics and domestics during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

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## Abstract

The present article aims to contribute to theorisations of the politics of time through a detailed engagement with techno-aesthetic strategies of temporal synchronisation and heterogeneisation of everyday rhythms during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. The exploration focuses on practices of mediatisation of domestic spaces, in particular by examining photographs posted on the Bulgarian-language ‘View from the Window’ Facebook group. The group was founded during the first coronavirus lockdown in April 2020 and its members used it to share images taken from their private homes onto exterior spaces. Theoretically, I build on Henri Lefebvre’s rhythmanalytical project, from which I derive an understanding of the polyrhythmic and multi-scalar character of the everyday, while engaging writings from visual cultures, performance studies, architecture and media theory. The article looks closely at two formal aesthetic strategies that established themselves for posting on the group: The visual strategy of framing and the use of time stamps in image captions. On the one hand, I show how these media practices are engaged in synchronising views with each other; I argue that they contribute to the creation of an equivalence between views while obfuscating their underlying socio-material conditions, which tend

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to remain outside of the photographic frame. On the other hand, I also demonstrate that these practices can be equally generative of asynchronicity and dissonance between views, bringing to the fore a spatio-temporal heterogeneity and the articulation of stark socio-political differences. The article thus contributes an analysis of the interplay between time, politics and domesticity through the conceptual prism of an engagement with aesthetic practices of mediation.

### **Keywords**

View From the Window, rhythmanalysis, temporal politics, domesticity, framing, synchronisation, asynchronicity, coronavirus, pandemic, time stamp

### **Introduction**

One way of approaching the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is by tracing the fault lines of intersecting temporal regimes that conjoin, amplify, or interrupt each other while the virus spreads and mutates. Expert and every-day discourses approach these temporalities at different scales and with different tools: From ascertaining the incubation period of the virus to determining the duration of isolation periods at home after international travel, close contact with an infected person or when oneself has contracted the virus. Similarly involving temporal calculations is the determination of the optimal temporal gap between inoculations (which varies for vaccines developed by different pharmaceutical companies) but also the race of affluent countries to strike deals with manufacturers, while competing between each other in their vaccination programmes to ensure the fastest return to full-speed productivity and ‘normal’ functioning of their economies. At the same time, the effects of indeterminacy, insecurity and waiting are differentially endured by subjects, who are positioned differently in relation to social categories such as gender, race, class, age, or disability. Moreover, we have seen how time-based measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus cross, suspend and tamper with other socio-ecological temporalities: the life cycle of crops to be harvested by migrant hands; those of school and academic terms; the calendar years with their annual high points of feasts and celebrations; the temporal relation to the home as a site of social reproduction, remote work, confinement.

As argued by Markus Lundström in relation to the diversity of ways in which residents of Norra Botkyrka, a municipality near Stockholm, relate temporally to the coronavirus pandemic, the frequently applied notion of ‘crisis’ works as a ‘totalizing concept that synchronises diverse experiences into a globalised, temporal regime’ (Lundström, 2022: 318). Furthermore, he contends that the term ‘obscures the social differences and structural inequalities that underpin the crisis’ (ibid.); its blanket adoption arguably precludes the possibility of analysing

the heterogeneity of what with Barbara Adam can be described as pandemic ‘timescapes’ (1998). Sharing a commitment to accounting for the temporal diversity of the everyday, this article aims to contribute to our understanding of the politics of time by exploring modes of temporal heterogeneisation and synchronisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It orients its analysis towards the examination of the mediatisation of domestic spaces on the Bulgarian-language Facebook group ‘View from the Window’ (*Gledka prez prozoretsa*). On it, people shared images of exterior spaces shot from the vantage point of their windows amidst national lockdowns and other measures that enforced prolonged stays at home during the pandemic. I look at the way in which formal constraints and conventions that established themselves for posting on the group – such as the use of (window) frames and time stamps – contribute to the creation of a common vocabulary and a shared spatio-temporal environment, but also afford for the emergence of controversies. These disputes unfold in comments sections below posts, and I examine such instances in the later course of this article. I undertake this exploration with the intention of, on the one hand, prying open the productive processes and media practices through which temporal alignment and synchronisation are achieved, while, on the other, shedding light on the ways in which the bringing together of disparate temporal positions can also create a ground for contestation and the articulation of socio-political differences.

Theoretically, I build on Henri Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythm analytical project, from which I derive an understanding of the polyrhythmic and multi-scalar character of the everyday, while engaging writings from performance studies, architecture and media theory (Colomina, 1994; Friedberg, 2006; Fuller and Goriunova, 2019; Keenan, 1993; Palladini, 2019). I argue for a conception of the home as a terrain of politics that is rhythmically constituted and open towards a spatio-temporal environment, which is itself animated by the ‘interaction of diverse, repetitive and different rhythms’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 30). As the subsequent analysis demonstrates, Lefebvre’s work is useful for its elaboration of rhythm analysis as both theory and method. However, where the current account ultimately departs from his, is in refraining from using generalising notions of ‘the media’, which arguably reduce media practices to a merely representational function vis-à-vis everyday life (Lefebvre, 2004: 47ff). What I am here instead interested in – with and against Lefebvre – is the temporal productivity of mediation practices that experiment with (and not just ‘depict’ or ‘occupy’, as he would argue) the rhythms of the everyday.

The article’s central case study – the Bulgarian-language Facebook group ‘View from the Window’, created in the early months of the coronavirus pandemic – is drawn from the Bulgarian context. This focus is placed not in an attempt to offer a comprehensive overview of the country’s response to the pandemic, but rather to construct a partial and situated insight into some of the ways in which we can come to understand the politically inflected relationship between domesticity and temporality.

## Rhythmanalysis as method

As suggested by Birgan Gökmenoğlu, sociology and social sciences ‘lack [...] a common vocabulary to talk about time in politics’ (Gökmenoğlu, 2022: 644). Arguably, this conceptual and terminological diversity is not restricted to the field of sociology but is rather a feature of most if not all writing about time. The present article aims to contribute to theorisations of time not by introducing new terminological distinctions and refinements of its study vis-à-vis politics; instead, it examines the relationship between domesticity and time through a detailed engagement with specific strategies of synchronisation and desynchronisation of everyday rhythms. To tackle this question, I narrow down the focus of the exploration by visually analysing several images shared on the Bulgarian-language ‘View from the Window’ Facebook group during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as discussing the disputes unfolding in their accompanying comments.

While this text’s main set of concerns centre on time and temporality, a central theoretical assumption that underlies it is the idea that the categories of space and time are dynamically produced and relational, rather than neatly separated from one another – an insight which I draw from cultural topology (cf. Allen, 2011; Lury, 2021; Lury et al., 2012), but which is also central to Lefebvre’s understanding of rhythm. According to him, rhythm is produced ‘everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 15). In line with Russell West-Pavlov’s elaboration, in my working definition of time it presents itself as an ‘immensely complex, interrelating and overlapping network of dynamic processes, each with its own tempo, life-span, and diachronic-synchronic transitions with previous, simultaneous or neighbouring, and successor processes’ (West-Pavlov, 2013: 52). This formulation suggests an immanent and multi-scalar conception of time – that is, it encourages us to consider a multiplicity of temporal scales that overlap and link with each other. These are produced and reshaped, organised and narrated, inhabited and subverted in a multiplicity of ways by different organisms, situations, institutions, measuring devices and so forth.

A fruitful methodological and conceptual approach to understanding the layering of spatio-temporal regimes can be found in Henri Lefebvre’s rhythmanalytical project. What is valuable in his homonymous work is the insistence on relationality and dynamism, as well as the use of the notion of ‘rhythm’ as both a method and abstraction. This allows us to access the polyrhythmic character of the everyday by isolating ‘*from within* the organised whole a particular movement and its rhythm’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 16; emphasis mine). Rhythm in his writing functions as a modality linking time, space, and energy across different scales of articulation: ‘There is neither separation nor an abyss between so-called material bodies, living bodies, social bodies and representations, ideologies,

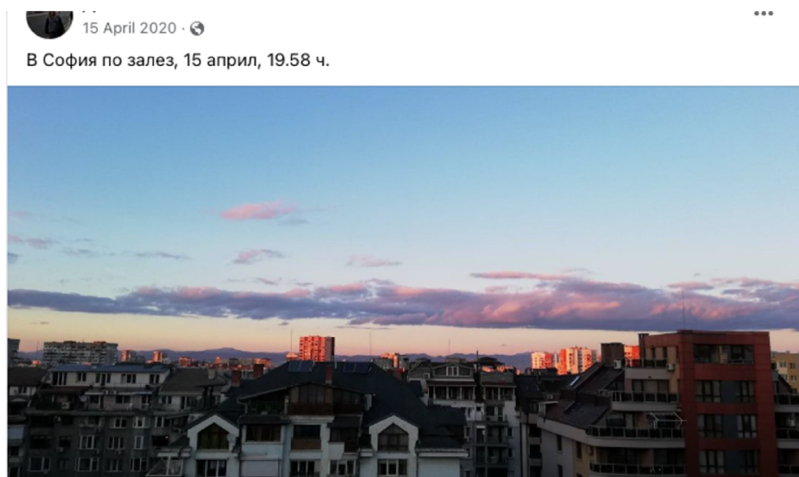
traditions, projects and utopias. They are all composed of (reciprocally influential) rhythms in interaction' (2004: 43). At the same time, in Lefebvre's account every scale is already polyrhythmic: For instance, a garden is a kind of symphony, because 'each plant, each tree, has its rhythm, made up of several' (2004: 31), and so is the human body, which also involves the rhythms of different organs working more or less in concert with each other.<sup>1</sup> As a theory and a method brought in relation to COVID-19, rhythmanalysis forces us to recognise that the unfolding of the pandemic; the various institutionalised attempts to domesticate the virus; as well as the multiple ways in which people were forced to reorganise their daily rhythms, together co-constitute a complex spatio-temporal setting that operates across numerous material and immaterial scales of articulation. Furthermore, it invites us to explore the specific ways in which these scales are temporally aligned, or synchronised with each other, as well as how they clash with and diverge from one another.

In line with Lefebvre's approach that seeks to isolate 'from within' a whole a specific rhythm or a movement, and by following feminist approaches to the production of knowledge that call for the epistemological value of a partial perspective (cf. Haraway, 1988) as well as for probing out the composition of aesthetic processes by acting in the 'middle of things' (Fuller and Goriunova, 2019: 102; cf. also Stengers, 2011), I situate the current exploration on the territory of the home. More specifically, I look at particular instances of the mediatisation of homes during the coronavirus pandemic and in doing so consider afresh some aspects of the relationship between time and politics. I insist on taking seriously media practices as neither neutral and innocent, nor acting as a mask and vessel of capitalist ideology (cf. Lefebvre, 2004: 47), but rather as generative of everyday rhythms. In that, my approach differs from Lefebvre's for whom the image, mediation, and representation are bundled and charged with occupying time and the living, robbing them of presence (ibid.).

## **View from the window**

Founded on 14 April 2020, almost exactly a month after the imposition of a full lockdown in the country, the Bulgarian-language Facebook group 'View from the Window' was modelled after the hugely popular international 'View from my Window' (VFMW), created a few weeks earlier and by that time already counting millions of members worldwide. The basic premise of both groups is that members are encouraged to take images from the windows of their private homes and share them with others, in an attempt 'to connect people from all over the world during the Corona lockdown' (Facebook, 2020) (cf. Figure 1).

While the rules for posting on VFMW have become increasingly concerned with calibrating the parameters of what counts as a 'unique' view and on insisting that one should only take photographs from one's 'permanent home', 'View from



**Figure 1.** Screenshot of a member’s post on FB group Gledka Prez Prozoretsa. Captioned: ‘Sofia at sunset, 15 April, 19.58 h’. Permission for reuse granted by author.

the Window’s administrators have taken the opposite approach. As the months went by and lockdowns were gradually eased in Bulgaria, group rules were relaxed as to include not only images taken through windows, doors, and other apertures of homes, but also from cars and further means of transport. While both groups stage a private view, the formal constraints for framing this view differ from each other, with VFMW’s being much more stringent. At the same time its creator, Barbara Durliau, sought to profit from it by drawing on the hundreds of thousands of images posted on the group for publications and an exhibition project.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, ‘View from the Window’ has stayed relatively small,<sup>3</sup> with little to no moderation efforts put into restricting the kind of content that can be posted on it, and with no explicit attempts on behalf of the administrators to monetise it. Of course, this is not an argument seeking to place ‘View from the Window’ in a privileged or innocent position vis-à-vis VFMW: both groups are hosted on a proprietary social media platform, with the creation of surplus value on Facebook being reliant upon the unpaid labour of users who generate content on it (cf. Fuchs, 2010; Terranova, 2004).

Creatures of the coronavirus pandemic, the popularity of both groups has dwindled since lockdowns were lifted around the globe and the memory of the pandemic itself is for many beginning to fade (Galvão, 2023; Sima, 2023). However, at the height of the first lockdown in Bulgaria, when ‘View from the Window’ was founded, posts on it were seen, commented on, and liked by hundreds, if not thousands of users. Exotic locations but also antagonistic captions, as outlined further below, made for higher engagement and, sometimes, for heated discussions.

In Bulgaria, the first coronavirus lockdown was declared on 13 March 2020, after 31 confirmed coronavirus cases in the country (Ministry of Health, 2020). It was then prolonged for another month, before being replaced by a series of legal states defined as ‘extraordinary epidemic situations’, which lasted until April 2022. The succession of extraordinary legal measures imposed a peculiar rhythm in the country, which crossed, as elsewhere, with public holidays, school calendars, patterns of work, academic terms, and climate patterns in modulating the speed and intensity of the viral transmission. For example, exit from and entry into the capital Sofia was blocked between 17 and 21 April 2020 to limit the propagation of the virus through people who were expected to travel to the countryside to spend Orthodox Easter holidays with relatives. Moreover, the highest number of coronavirus cases in Bulgaria would typically be reported in the autumn months (when school years begin, and temperatures drop) as well as at the beginning of the calendar year (between January and March). These spikes would then be followed by the imposition of stricter social distancing measures and repeated closures of nurseries and schools. Thus, lockdowns also circumscribed the domestic sphere as a site of intensified paid and unpaid labour, in particular for women who found themselves juggling their jobs with childcare responsibilities.

Many of the accounts that take the lived experience of COVID-19 lockdowns as a starting point for theoretical elaborations, grapple with the peculiar character of time spent at home and the effects of waiting. In the words of Megan Craig who recounts her attempts to write and think while being interrupted by her children: ‘This time can have the feeling of being endless and infinitely slow, not because nothing is happening, but because there is so much repetition and waiting for something to begin and for something else to end’ (Craig in: Grusin and Ryan, 2022: 25). Adriana Zaharijević describes how the pandemic acts upon our experience of time as something that is *simultaneously* enclosed and interminable, making days ‘edgeless’ (Zaharijević, 2020: 64), while for Levi R. Bryant life in the ‘perpetual long 2020’ is characterised by the paradox of too much and too little happening at once (Bryant in: Grusin and Ryan, 2022: 14). On her part, writing from within a domestic space permeated by waiting, Yasemin Shamma reminds us that ‘the shared, stretched-over all, temporality of our global wait, means that the dimensions of the personal, domestic and sometimes political temporalities are wont to implode’ (Shamma, 2020b).

With Lefebvre, we can think of the domestic sphere as one that is rhythmically produced but also, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, whose temporal consistency can be refashioned by and absorbed into rhythms that unfold at a wider scale. The consecutive imposition of national lockdowns and their interference with other socially instituted temporal cycles – such as those of the working week or the terms of academic and school years – for many, especially for those with caring responsibilities, led to an intensification and lengthening of working

days at home. Meantime, in other instances the enforcement of prolonged periods of waiting at home also opened a crack within existing temporal patterns of inhabiting domestic spaces. Whether starting to cook dishes that rely on a ‘long-short sense of time’ and necessitate patience (Shamma, 2020b); creating sacred spaces at home in the context of ‘domestication of religious practice’ (Burrell et al., 2021); tending to gardens, these ‘seasonal clocks’ (Shamma, 2020a) or playfully engaging in a re-enactment of prominent art historical paintings at home (Katz, 2021) – in all of these cases time at home is reconfigured and reconstituted through practices that bring with themselves novel durations, speeds and rhythms.

The Facebook group ‘View from the Window’ is arguably one such instance of a pastime that was situated in the domestic sphere during the COVID-19 pandemic. Composing and ‘shooting’ views onto exterior spaces from windows of private homes, images on the group are oftentimes captioned and accompanied with a timestamp that registers the exact time when they were made. Arguably, these group posts probe out the porosity of boundaries between private and public, domestic and political, exterior and interior. Furthermore, they do so in not only spatial, but also in a temporal sense – an issue I explore further below.

## Framing the view

My aim in this section is to shed light on how, on the Facebook group ‘View from the Window’, the practice of *framing* became a method of synchronisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group’s simple rule, which stipulates that images need to be shot through windows, produced a huge variety of shots onto wildly different environments and social settings, while inviting users to collectively construct a view onto the pandemic as seen from the vantage point of the home. My contention is that this practice of framing contributed to the ‘synchronisation’ of views with one another other – i.e., it allowed distinctly different views, borne out of different domestic rhythms, oftentimes located in different time-zones, to be brought together in the same timespace, construing a heterogeneous and dynamic environment that harboured multiple overlapping rhythms. By complying to the formal constraint of capturing a view onto the outside from their private window, users of the group ensured that their images would come to partake in the construction of a shared, albeit fragmented and fractured, perspective on the pandemic from the vantage point of the private home.

The workings of this synchronisation have decidedly political implications; the adoption of the frame as a unifying aesthetic strategy attests to a specific understanding of the relation between private and public space, and to the assumption that it is possible to ‘equalise’ or synchronise disparate views without necessarily accounting for their material and social conditions of visibility. On the one hand, the use of the window frame as a common aesthetic strategy





**Figure 2.** Screenshot from FB group Gledka Prez Prozoretsa. Caption: ‘Sofia 24 April 2020, 17:40, Kamen Del peak in the background. Everyone hopes it will be soon possible to go there. Even those, who didn’t express such a wish before :)’ Permission for reuse granted by author.

on the group could be seen to be relatively open, even ‘democratic’. By this I mean that the formal simplicity of the rule asking users to shoot images from windows allows the frame to be widely adopted and interpreted, thus contributing to the building of a common vocabulary and an inventory of views onto the pandemic (itself imagined to be shared and experienced equally by everyone) (Figure 2).

On the other hand, this very same aesthetic strategy of framing is arguably complicit in obfuscating the socio-material conditions that afford for disparate views to be brought together in a timespace that is only seemingly devoid of conflict. These conditions, characterised by glaring inequality in the distribution of suffering during the pandemic, by definition have to remain outside of the photographic frame. Thus, one way of reading how 'View from the Window' produces a domestic sphere in relation to an exterior – that of vacated streets of cities across the globe, sunset-bathed skylines captured from high-rising apartment blocks, or pristine landscapes and sea-views – can be formulated in terms of the group's involvement in the staging of the private home as a localised site of individual expression and a privatisation of the view<sup>4</sup>. During the pandemic, epidemiological and political discourses sought to posit 'staying at home' as the responsibility of individual citizens, presupposing a uniform idea of the home. More often than not, these appeals fell short of accounting for the divergent and uneven ways in which homes are practiced, co-habited and constituted at the crossroads of social infrastructures which remained (in)accessible to a different degree for differently gendered, aged, classed, and racialised subjects. Hence, the logic of the Facebook group arguably reproduces and stabilises this presupposition of an *equivalence* between 'views', which can be simply brought together in the allegedly neutral space of the social media platform. Situated in the safe confines of interior domestic spaces, disconnected occupants shoot 'views' through their windows onto an outside that is framed, brought under control, and, in a way, domesticated. In that, both the position of the subject taking and posting the pictures, and the domestic environment as a site of social (re)production and friction, remain outside of the photographic frame (cf. Figure 3).

Many architecture and media theory scholars have deliberated the architectural significance of windows and frames, the interrelation between architecture and mediation, as well as the relationship between space, visibility and power. For instance, Thomas Keenan posits that the window mediates the relationship between the private home and the public sphere and insists that it 'organizes and secures its inaugural distinction between public and private' (Keenan, 1993: 132). For him, the window necessarily raises questions of publicity and politics precisely because of its ambiguous role in maintaining a separation between exterior and interior, privacy and publicity. This is a point that will be of particular relevance when, in the latter part of this article, I consider moments when seemingly equal views from windows come to clash with each other.

As indicated in the beginning of this section, my point in discussing the role of window frames as important organising principles for content posted on 'View from the Window' has to do with the way in which they are engaged in the production of an equivalence of views; in dramatising the distinction between private and public; and in temporally synchronising the views from the domestic environments they are an integral part of, albeit ambivalently so. The view from

21 April 2020 · 🌐

Двойната дъга от вчера 20.04.2020 – Лас Вегас, Невада. Засилени са цветовете, за да изпъкне повече дъгата 🌈🌈🇺🇸



**Figure 3.** Screenshot from FB group Gledka Prez Prozoretsa. Caption: ‘The double rainbow from yesterday 20.04.2020 – Las Vegas, Nevada. The colours have been enhanced to highlight the rainbow (emojis)’. Permission for reuse granted by author.

the window captures in time the intersection of everyday, polyrhythmic qualities ‘of both the inside and the outside world’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 33). Unlike the image, which he mistrusts, Lefebvre contends that the window ‘offers views that are more than spectacles’, insisting that its lessons are not exhausted, because they constantly ‘renew themselves’ (ibid.). Lefebvre’s rhythm analyst, who seeks to attend to the multi-scalar and intersecting rhythms of street, home, garden, money, capital, is perched at her window or balcony, for ‘it is [necessary] to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 27) in order to grasp these rhythms. If we were to extend Lefebvre’s passionate embrace of the window as an invaluable analytic position to the operations of images, our questions would multiply further: What happens to daily rhythms when we are faced with a (window) frame within a (window/Windows) frame? When we come to temporarily share the view from someone else’s window while looking at our computer or smartphone screen? When this view is followed by another, and another – each one remote from one another in ways spatial, temporal, socio-political?

In her seminal work in architecture and media theory, ‘The Virtual Window’, Anne Friedberg (2006) examines different registers of the window: As an architectural element, metaphor and virtual window. She brings together various historical trajectories and philosophical accounts that engage with these overlapping

aspects of the window, ‘from Alberti to Microsoft’ – as the subtitle of her book reads. When writing about ‘[t]he screens of cinema, television, and computers’, she contends that they ‘open “virtual windows” that ventilate the *static* materialities and temporalities of their viewers’ (Friedberg, 2006: 4; emphasis mine), arguing that these screens have ‘become substitutes for the architectural window’ (2006: 11). While a discussion of strategies of framing on the Facebook group ‘View from the Window’ might prompt us to critically revisit some of Friedberg’s claims<sup>5</sup>, what is nevertheless valuable in her work is the attention she pays to the constitutive dynamics of what she describes as ‘newly mediated “time architecture”’ (2006: 93). If for Lefebvre the window constitutes a liminal, dynamic site from where the polytemporality and multiple rhythms of the street can be best appraised, Friedberg needs to ‘fix’ the architectural window with its ‘single-frame “window” view’ (2006: 93) to *then* posit that screens and moving images break with its stasis and animate it. She writes that:

once two or more moving images are included within a single frame – split-screen or multiple-screen films, inset screens on television, *multiple windows on the computer screen* – an even more fractured spatiotemporal representational system emerges. (ibid; emphasis mine).

Thus, if from Lefebvre we borrow an understanding of the view from the window as always orienting us towards multiple intersecting rhythms, to Friedberg we owe the insight that ‘new temporal dimensions’ (ibid.) are forged when multiple windows are inset into one another on media screens.<sup>6</sup> This is so because each of them is positioned differently within a distinct spatiotemporal environment and attests to different velocities, rhythms and durations.

‘View from the Window’ brings hundreds, if not thousands of window views in proximity to one another: each of them frames in a different way the relation between the public and the domestic; it documents a distinct moment in the unfolding of the pandemic and offers a perspective that is in some ways synchronous with others, whereas in other ways it might veer away from established temporal coordinates. The presupposed ‘equality’ between views is in such moments destabilised and a temporal, spatial and political heterogeneity comes to the fore instead. In the next section, I look at a further (techno-)aesthetic strategy of synchronisation and desynchronisation that can be found on the group – the use of timestamps in captions – before moving, in the final section, to an exploration of the emergence of disputes and debates below user posts.

## Clocking the view

‘What is a tomorrow or a day after tomorrow when there is no difference between days? When the days are edgeless?’, asks Adriana Zaharijević (2020: 64).

As indicated above, for many the series of lockdowns during the pandemic was characterised by an altered relationship to time, whereby the experience of spatial enclosure was compounded by a temporal indeterminacy and becoming saturated by a ‘slow-fast passing of time’ in waiting (Shamma, 2020b). In this context, it is striking that one of the aesthetic strategies that firmly established itself on the Facebook group ‘View from the Window’, had to do with the precise registering of time. Whereas the use of window frames is codified both in the rules for posting (which, as aforementioned, became laxer with time) and is reflected in the group’s title itself, the use of time stamps in image captions is a convention that established itself through imitation and repetition by different users. On the group, many users chose to detail in the image caption the exact moment in which their photograph was taken, thus dramatising a link between a singular *view* and a singular *moment* in time.

Similarly to the use of frames, this aesthetic strategy has a double function. On the one hand, it contributes to the synchronisation of views with each other: when detailing the precise moment when their images were taken, the photographers refer to the socially instituted clock time. Positioning themselves within its parameters allows them to establish a mechanism for translating to one another divergent experiences and views onto the pandemic; this mechanism arguably performs an equalising and synchronising function. The divergent views are integrated into and ordered within a dominant temporal regime – that is, ‘clock time’, which is ‘at the heart of both the ‘normal’ workings of capitalism and those crisis moments that punctuate its history’ (Castree, 2009: 40)<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, detailing the temporal coordinates of the views from the windows contributes to the production of a sense of truthfulness and documentary veracity. This is achieved by the workings of two forms of localisation: in space – when a view from a particular window overlooking a specific scene is captured; and in time – when this view is called upon to bear witness to a specific instance from the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of timestamps in the image caption thus also presents itself as a mode of ‘framing’ the captured moment and its integration within an established temporal order.

On the other hand, this gesture of temporal localisation through the use of timestamps also has a socialising and heterogenising function: By orienting individual views shot from private homes towards ‘clock time’, it opens up the domestic environment with its peculiar rhythms to the rhythms and measures of social and political life. In doing so, it also brings with itself the possibility for asynchronicity and divergence from established spatio-temporal and socio-political coordinates.

Timestamps can be seen as contributing to a temporal heterogeneity and asynchronicity in a different sense too: on the Facebook group’s ‘timeline’ user posts are shown on a vertical pane so that each scroll produces a rhythmic succession composed of metadata (username, time of posting and privacy settings), a caption, the photograph itself, followed by the number of reactions and

comments. The time when the image has been posted will appear differently according to users' time-zone settings on Facebook. Moreover, the timestamp that an author might choose to add to the caption will rarely coincide with the time of posting. Each scroll, then, generates an ordered succession of images, whereby spatially, socially, and temporally divergent views from domestic spaces are brought in proximity to one another. Together, they draw alternative spatio-temporal coordinates of the pandemic, as witnessed, clocked in, and narrated from the vantage point of often contrasting domestic settings.

Working akin to temporal refrains, the timestamps arguably contribute to a delineation of the boundaries of the domestic and the articulation of a singular, isolated 'here and now', but also to its opening up to external spatio-temporal coordinates. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a refrain not only holds a territory together, by *momentarily* drawing a centre, a sonorous thread to hold on to, but it also opens a crack, an opening *from within it* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 362; 380). Hence, the timestamps fix in time the view from the window of the private home, narrowing it down to a singular, localised moment, but they also work together to redraw the temporal coordinates of the pandemic, introducing cracks within it. Finally, they draw internal vectors of differentiation within the everyday experience of 'edgelessness', interminability and waiting that characterise the time of the pandemic. These singular moments not only attest to specific instances but also acquire a peculiar afterlife and stretch into the future. Years after the photographs were posted, they are still retrievable and traceable on the group, which starts working as an archive. Views from hundreds of windows overlooking courtyards, boulevards and meadows follow each other – at times in a seemingly effortless and smooth manner, whereas at others in a way that forces controversies into the frame of vision.

## Times of discord

In the previous sections, I discussed the way in which the practice of framing as well as the use of timestamps attempt to achieve an equalisation and synchronisation between different views shot from domestic settings, to a large extent erasing their divergent socio-material conditions of possibility albeit never completely. In this section, I would like to show that the commodification and domination over a private view as well as the removal of the photographic subject from a domestic space (a sphere that partially conditions but doesn't overdetermine that subject) are never final. The possibility of overexposure of the domestic interior 'to the exterior against which it defines itself' (Keenan, 1993: 124) is always present and can become a site of discord and political contest.

While a great number of images on the group are composed in a way that suggests affluence and tranquillity – snapshots taken from members of the Bulgarian diaspora<sup>8</sup> out of windows in Las Vegas (Figure 3), London, Reykjavík and even Svalbard, or

by people who have been able to isolate in the mountains or at the sea – another set of posts explicitly juxtaposes these ‘views’ to the ‘reality’ of life in Bulgaria. For instance, one post features a large panel block of flats whose individual balconies and floors are painted and insulated in a vastly divergent manner. The image caption reads: ‘A little bit of reality, it can’t be only [about] tulips and skies. Sofia, Mladost 3, 13.53, 2 May 2020’ (Petkova, 2020) (Figure 4). The post had over 1100 reactions and attracted almost 200 comments – some of them ironically praising the trees that can also be seen on the image, while others describing the sight as ‘sad’, ‘terrifying’ and ‘ugly’. It is a polarising image that also provoked a series of comments asserting the need to witness more realistic views on the group and pointing out the alienating effect produced by being constantly confronted with depictions of prosperity: ‘... I refrain from posting, because I expected more reality, and this is a bit like a group for boasting, if you happen to not have a garden, but have a panel [block] instead, you refrain [from posting]’ (Rasheva, 2020).

In another instance a member shared an image taken from above, showing two birds nesting within a narrow, grimy cleft between a windowpane and a ledge. The author interpreted the scene in the following way: ‘Sofia, 17.18 h, Monday, 20 April, 2020. She is brooding on two eggs, while her guy bothers her with a straw. Sad and manly. ps. the idea behind this group seemed to be *not about showing prosperity, but rather how things are now*’ (Borishev, 2020; emphasis mine). Again, while some comments dwell on the gender dynamics of this avian



**Figure 4.** A little bit of reality, it can’t be only [about] tulips and skies. Sofia, Mladost 3, 13.53, 2 May 2020. Permission for reuse granted by author.

home, describing it as ‘family idyll’, others reproach the user for being ‘acrimonious’ and ‘envious’ of the fortune of others. Another group member chimes in and states that many of the window views shared on the group make them feel as if they’re watching a Manet-reproduction while being stuck in a prison cell – this clearly referring to the person’s own living conditions (Vasileva, 2020) (Figure 5).

The unfolding of these and other controversies gesture towards the uneven socio-economic realities underlying the seemingly equal ‘views’ shot from windows to politically re-ground them within the domestic spaces that they co-constitute. Far from remaining a consensual succession of windows affording the undisturbed passage of a ‘tourist gaze’ (Thompson, 2005; Urry, 1990) into remote, distanced places, in these cases the windows as if ‘fall back’ onto the spaces and subjects implied yet not directly pictured in them, exposing the porosity of the domestic boundaries to an outside.

Here, we could draw from Giulia Palladini’s writing on domesticity and performance in which she insists that the ‘field of domestics [...] is not a given, just as the idea of a house is not a given: a house is a complicated thing’ (Palladini, 2019: 114). Her work is relevant here because she seeks to reframe domestics as a ‘category in its own right’ (2019: 108), uncoupling it from ‘the notion of “domestication”, understood as a process of restriction, control and limitation’ (2019: 112).



**Figure 5.** Sofia, 17.18 h, Monday, 20 April, 2020. She is brooding on two eggs, while her guy bothers her with a straw. Sad and manly. ps. the idea behind this group seemed to be not about showing prosperity, but rather how things are now. Permission for reuse granted by author.



On the one hand, it is doubtless that any attempt at reappraising and reconfiguring the domestic sphere needs to account not only for the ways in which it has historically been constituted in opposition to the public realm of political action, but also for the radical ambiguity of any claim to a home.<sup>9</sup> Already before people were compelled to ‘stay at home to save lives’ during the pandemic, staying at home was not an uncomplicated action for everyone – the house is not only a shelter but also ‘a matter of privilege, of survival, [...] a burden, a hope, a limit, a grave’ (2019: 114). On the other hand, what interests me in Palladini’s work, as well as in other writings, such as Matthew Fuller and Olga Goriunova’s *Bleak Joys* (2019), is that they are not satisfied with diagnosing the home’s potentially oppressive character. Concerned with articulating a specificity of the ‘domestic’, Palladini argues that ‘domestics’ as a ‘category is not a given, but a field of struggle and imagination’ (Palladini, 2019: 107) – an intuition she shares with Fuller and Goriunova, who seek to reframe the home in aesthetic and ecological terms, speculatively opening it towards the forest (Fuller and Goriunova, 2019: 121–129).

## Conclusion

Photographs shared on ‘View from the Window’ attest to the situated, non-neutral ways in which homes are produced, mediated, and inhabited. The aesthetic strategies that users adopted to frame and temporally anchor their images within socially instituted parameters of the dominant ‘clock time’ can be seen as practices of synchronisation, whose efficacy is predicated upon the presumption of a formal equivalence and equality between views. However, when contributors to the group directly challenge this assumption, insisting on the socio-economic differences between their living conditions, a heterogeneity and asynchronicity comes to the fore instead. Invoking Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythm-analytical project, we are compelled to acknowledge that divergent rhythms and temporalities are tied to different material and social realities. These force themselves (back) into our field of vision, becoming a part of the view: indeed, the length of your day will depend on whether you have a garden or not; the burden of how many shifts you have to carry; or whether your home feels more like a ‘prison’, or more like a ‘Manet-reproduction’ while you wait for the end of the latest lockdown.

Exploring the aesthetic practices of synchronisation and asynchronisation on the ‘View from the Window’ Facebook group during the COVID-19 pandemic invited us to acknowledge that homemaking is always a political process, and domesticity is produced in relation to socially instituted and constantly reproduced rhythms. At the same time, this discussion also arguably brought to the fore a different notion of time, which ‘might be figured [...] as a persistent ‘doing’: A temporality which disavows both the horizon of the event and a messianic notion of futurity’ (Palladini, 2019: 120).

One of the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is that however contagious and deadly the coronavirus was and still is, the socio-political and economic effects of the pandemic are not easily generalisable, not easy to be placed within a neat timeline with a clear beginning and an end, and difficult to package within a uniform idea of ‘crisis’ affecting everyone equally and unfolding everywhere with the same pace, velocity, and ferocity. Our political analyses hence need to account both for strategies of structuring and ordering time that work to consolidate and synchronise with each other different temporal experiences, as well as for processes of heterogeneity and experimentation that can be productive of divergent and asynchronous temporalities.

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### **Notes**

1. See ‘November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?’ in: Deleuze and Guattari (2013: 149–166) for an account that compels us to move beyond an organicist conception of the body.
2. According to VFMW’s rules, by posting on it, users automatically grant permission for free of charge reuse of their photographs. Two hardcover publications with collected photographs from the group are on sale, while an exhibition in Brussels’ AtomiumExpo was held between March 2022 and May 2023.
3. As of February 2024, it counts ca. 39,000 members.
4. I would like to thank Celia Lury for thinking with me through some of the central claims here. Daniel Mann’s (2022) writings have also been an important source of inspiration.

5. For instance, the claim of a ‘substitution’ of architectural windows through screens, or the speculation that, with the computer, the fragmentation of the screen into multiple windows indicates a ‘postperspectival’ (2006: 210ff) shift. Indeed, images posted on ‘View from the Window’ overtly embrace and experiment with frames, perspective, and different degrees of coincidence between screen frame and architectural frame. Paying close attention to these strategies would belie attempts to stipulate a clearcut substitution of architectural windows with screens or the disappearance of the importance of perspective.
6. For a reader of Guattari, who rejects both catastrophic and overly celebratory notions of technical machines, while encouraging us to think with material and semiotic assemblages (Guattari, 1995, 2000) instead of with abysses and structural oppositions, it is difficult to enthusiastically follow either Lefebvre or Friedberg. This is due to the former’s slightly conservative (albeit valuable in its anti-capitalist charge) reading of media and to Friedberg’s tendency to over-emphasize ‘new’ media’s originality and, indeed, radical novelty vis-à-vis other media forms. This is not an argumentative line I can develop here with the care that it deserves, but I would like to nevertheless indicate a certain theoretical distance to both of their positions.
7. An in-depth discussion of the relation between time and capitalism is beyond the scope of this work and not where I seek to intervene theoretically. For such discussions, see: Foucault (1995), Lanci (2022), Marx (1992), Postone (1993).
8. Many members of the group live abroad, which is significant as it reflects demographic developments in the country’s post-socialist context: ca. 2.5 million Bulgarian nationals have emigrated since the beginning of the 1990s, with ca. 6.5 million now living on its territory.
9. The literature that strives to denaturalize the domestic sphere’s decoupling from the realm of public action, as well as to politicize our understanding of homes as sites of social (re)productive processes, is vast. We could draw connective lines to feminist writings on homes as site of social reproductive yet unpaid labor (Cox and Federici, 1975; Federici, 2012; Hochschild and Machung, 1990; James, 2012); to scholarship that explores how homes are utilised for the production of political belonging to territory and nationhood (Boym, 2007; Kotef, 2020); to writings that appraise the mediatization of homes and their enlistment in military imaginaries (Colomina, 1991; Mann, 2022).

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