Health Punk vol. 2

FICTION
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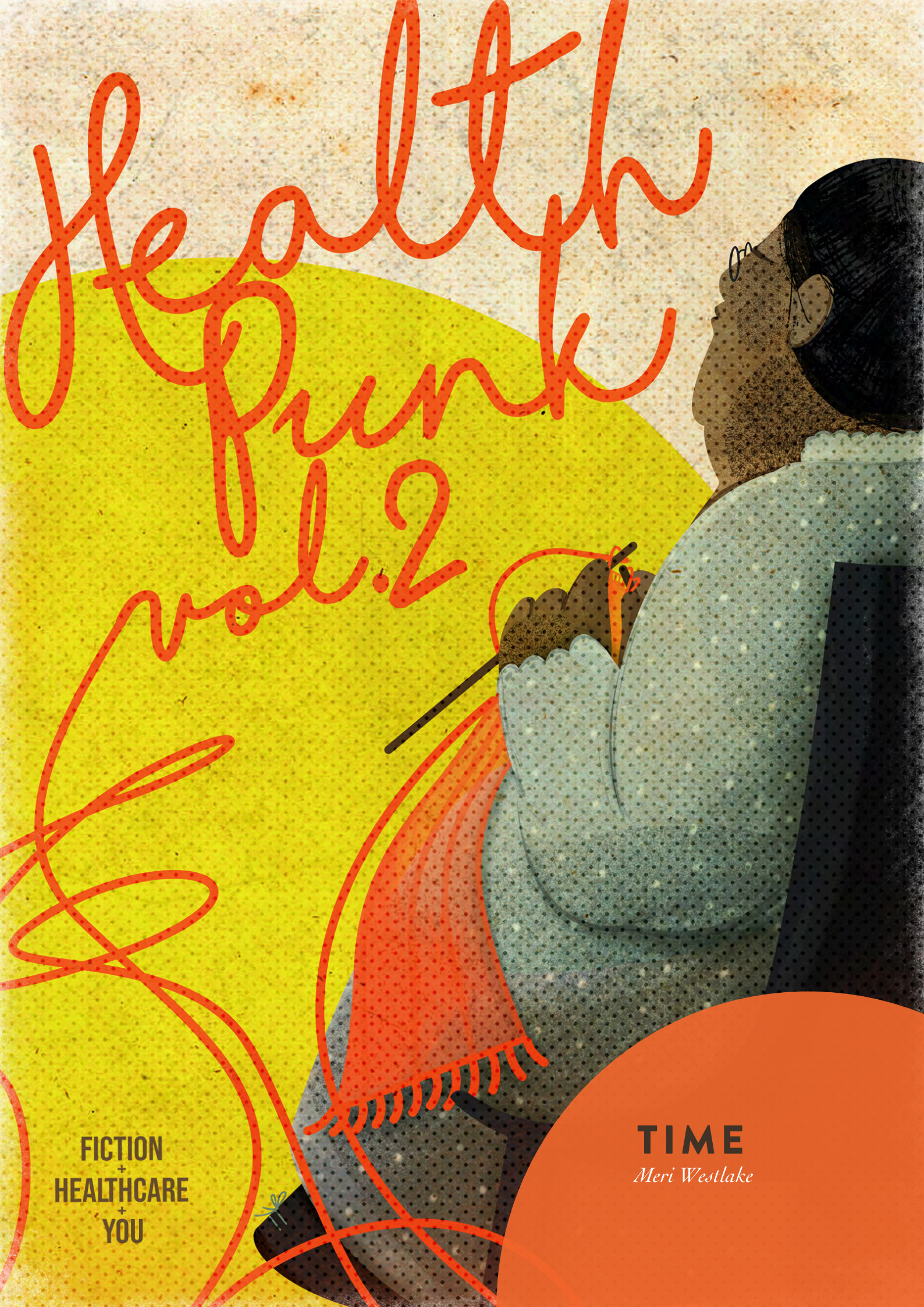
YOU



TIME

Meri Westlake

TIME

By Meri Westlake

Everyone is trying to get more time, to live longer, gather more money or resources, or power. And when biology finally comes ticking, people seek more time through infamy. A desire to live forever meant losing sight of what's here and now. We became so anxious of the future, we forgot the present. Try to think back and remember the period between flights on a long layover. A lawless sense of passing, it's limbo with fluorescent lights. Imagine that sense applied to life. There's suddenly all the time in the world.

In previous times, the world was run to measures. Time, it seemed, was the most logical division by which to slice up existence. A highly curious choice given the cyclical nature of life. What seemed like entire forests' worth of paper and ink was dedicated to defining how to use time to its maximum. It was exhausting running from time, knowing the average human lifespan. The competition to do things the fastest, the moral injury of the "treat and yeet" crazed healthcare system, and the race to simultaneously end climate change while concurrently destroying the rainforest for next day delivery. Time, it seemed, fuelled the constant background panic of FOMO. It translated into columns and programs on how to squeeze the last drop of production from every nanosecond. How to use the gold dust that was hours of annual leave in the most efficient way possible. How many days something loved might expect to live well. What was the acceptable number of weeks to feel sad for? The months passed between a spark and a fire starting. The quality-adjusted life years we may stand to gain from one intervention or prevention. The terms of leaderships to celebrate or endure; the decades of prosperity or austerity; the centuries of progress or destruction. Time, seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia. Ultimately, to quote a long past singer "everything emptying into white[1]," but now there is no red-legged chicken here ready to strike.

My fascination with time emerged when considering the parameters of "prolonged bed rest." How long was prolonged? Was it standardised across all ages? Contexts? Conditions? Expectations of outcomes?

[1] Cat Stevens

Did prolonged really matter if there wasn't a unit of measurement for length of stay i.e. days or hours? In context, the pondering also coincided with the pilot reduction to a 4 day week. The same money for fewer hours, success will be measured by increased productivity. Why, I shrieked internally, what was the bloody obsession with productivity. As if it was possible, nay, desirable even to draw the maelstrom of collective experience into a neat equation: productivity = work done divided by time. At least they noted there were some sparkly secondary objectives - people might feel better, fewer commutes mean less carbon produced. They might even have a scrap of time to spend just being themselves, although productivity as the primary outcome still meant people measured themselves by how much they got done in the new time. Things like taking on a side hustle project, upgrading soft skills and languages, and grinding away at an unrealistic ideal of beauty.

But as I said, this is a world without time and the one downside is a lot of missed meetings. So let's take a movement through life post-time while I enjoy my bounty of a moment alone.

DEATH

It used to be a sucker punch to your soul moment. Time of death…

Closely followed by a time and date to collect their things, go to a funeral, grieve, to have moved on. In a world without time, psychiatrists and psychologists (pop or otherwise) can no longer draw blood in declaring one's mourning to now be of a length that is undesirable (read: your boss wants you back at work, the economy is tanking and that thing won't do itself, even though it probably would, GO GET THAT MONEY).

Similarly, without weeks, right-to-life advocates and pro-choice advocates have no battleground to draw a line in. A person carrying finds out when they find out and makes a choice at that time. It's a present-based decision with a little mix of the future(s) available. Certain sects remain hot under the collar, raging justice for the unborn. Other parts of the sect realised the battle for life lay beyond the first foundations and set about generating the social conditions needed to make childbearing the experience it could be. They became virtual dragon slayers to all that questioned the parents' choices around childrearing, such as feeding, sleeping, and discipline. Wars still wage around vaccinations and neurodevelopmental disorders. Yet, when there is no arbitrary line of progress, eccentricities are embraced. No longer does the line deviate, instead, it adds many threads to a Pandora's Box-like tapestry.

WORK

Taylorisation and efficiency metrics drove us to the brink of complete social destruction. Work now means completing things that fulfil us but contribute towards maintaining shared assets such as food sources, power sources, life, health, education and all the things governments

promised to make better but never quite got around to given that the years between being elected and getting re-elected seemed too short to achieve anything embedded. But us non-politicians were expected to have changed our entire lives and fortunes in the same years. Once time is removed - it becomes about being and doing rather than running down a clock to a final stop. Bullshit jobs for the sake of jobs disappeared. Even the most money-deranged elites worked out that if there was no time, there was no money. Plus, universal basic income sorted out some of the raging disparity. Ageism dropped almost overnight as wisdom and experience became the greatest asset. No years meant no ages, meaning no grand retirement parties and no sly terminations by age proxy. Society did bristle uncomfortably through the teething phase of balancing 'tried and tested' with novel approaches.

But, without time there can be no greedy bosses winding back clocks to return to the 16-hour days of yesteryear without the consent of the workers.

EDUCATION

We don't need no education, teacher leave those kids alone[2].

Few people now, baring the niche historians, will recall the concept of school years and term times. Without the mantle of achieving a government-mandated basic level of education (questionable), the focus has shifted to nurturing skills and interests. Learning is like everything, a collapsing cycle, but at least this one collapses outward. Parents start introducing their offspring to whatever they have to hand, and the village does the rest. Kids are no longer labelled lazy, after all - lazy is a time-based concept, a lack of expected achievement within a time period. Returning to the historians, they are treated a bit like mini rock stars. We have taken cues from our indigenous populations and embraced history as verbal and living (with a little bit of writing things down). The past is measured by major events often linked to our environment- great floods and fires. Things that really change places.

PLAY

HE'S DONE IT, HE'S SCORED IN THE DYING SECONDS OF EXTRA-TIME TO WIN THE WORLD CUP

How many times has this been shouted? Currently, you'd be looked at as if you'd gone a bit loco. But when play is not about divisions of work, rest and a termination time then the purpose is open to whatever the person makes of it. If you want to play, if you need to play, then play. There is no pushbacks or kick-offs, no playing for time. It's about the experience, satisfaction and effort, if you want it to be.

[2] Pink Floyd

MOVEMENT

Teleportation solved the public transportation and climate crisis. Seriously. When objects aren't fixed to their present location with a "time" barrier between them and something else, no schedule is needed, therefore no painful waits for a bus that's never coming to take you on that date, that, while awful, gave you a great story to dine out on with friends over shared food.

ENVIRONMENT

When time stopped we moved back into the rough, wandering cycles that have defined us for the stretches before the clock. Plants always had it right, a season or come back? The panic stopped when there was a collective pause, without dates and flashy deadlines it really did become about making things better for all of us before our collective cogs popped. We no longer put off tending to the vegetables, the list of must-dos, the desire for frolicking and connection. Unstructured doesn't mean unused, it certainly doesn't mean taken for granted either. No longer tied to carbon-hungry air or sea miles, seasonal and climate-specific foods can be enjoyed where and when they are best. If there ever was an advertisement for integrated cultures, the experience of food at its best comes incredibly close to perfection.

So what do we use to measure change? Mostly description with a healthy dose of contextual salt. There are but three times here now - present, past and future. Without measuring time we are now able to live communally in the present. In the long run, we are all dead, in the short run we need to thrive. A world without time means some surprises, it also means living within where you are. People are surprisingly kind when there is no chance to be inconvenienced temporally. It's almost as if, without the yardstick of time, what really matters comes through. There's no competition here, no league tables of fastest, no intentionally sabotaging delays. It's idyllic, so long as you stay put for the moments that matter most.

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