The Contemporary Condition: Key Concepts

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When are you from? Hondo Chinese Supermarket, Liverpool Biennial 2016. Photo: Mark McNulty.

Contemporary contemporary[1]

The designator 'contemporary art' refers to an art that somehow addresses and expresses the present. But what is this present? What constitutes the *present* present and the *contemporary* contemporary? 'When are you from?', as the legend on the Liverpool Biennial bags reads.

When did the present that we inhabit begin? Who is included in that 'we?' How far does it expand in space? When and where does it end?

Defining the *contemporary* contemporary – that is, the contemporary of our times rather than the contemporary of *any* time – is related to an understanding of the contemporary condition as being one of *con-temporaneity*. Contemporaneity is the bringing together of a multitude of different co-existing temporalities in the same historical present; it is an intensified planetary interconnectedness of different times and experiences of time. On a global macro-level, contemporaneity therefore refers to the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space of heterogeneous cultural clusters generated along different historical trajectories, across different scales, and in different localities, which also – on a micro-level – affects the time-experience of the individuals and groups inhabiting these clusters. This interconnection and bringing together of *different* times and experiences of time at a global or planetary scale, and their taking part in the *same* historical present, is what characterises our present, what constitutes the *contemporary* contemporary or the present present. Climate change and our entering into the geological era of the anthropocene in which the human species begins to face its own extinction in a certain sense forces contemporaneity or a shared present – and potential absence – upon us.Another factor in the production of contemporaneity is the development of planetary-scale computation, theorised by Benjamin Bratton as 'the Stack', which interconnects a number of different layers and facilitates interpenetration between digital and analogue times, and between computational, material and human times[2]– bringing into being a kind of planetary instantaneity in which every*one* and every*thing* takes part.

Thus, the *contemporary* contemporary is about a changing temporal quality of our or, perhaps more

objectively, *the* historical present and how something like the present and presence is perceived. It is about changes in what sociologist Helga Nowotny calls our *Eigenzeit*, self-time or proper time, understood as 'a constellation of beliefs regarding future, past and present [...] opinions about change and permanence, about the inevitability of death, about philosophical, religious and aesthetic judgements, and even about identities and allegiances. It stands for the totality of a person's or group's ideas and experiences of time.'[3]

According to Nowotny, people draw their fundamental thought categories, such as space and time, from social organisation. Individuals, societies, cultural groups have differing judgements about the role and importance of their own and of other people's and group's times. 'Contemporaneity' occurs through the bringing together of different social and historical times, through the bringing together of different *Eigenzeiten*, within what Peter Osborne calls the disjunctive 'living' unity of the historical present.[4] In other words, the way in which the *present* present is constituted is different from the way in which previous presents were constituted, and our conception of the contemporary and contemporaneity therefore needs to be historicised.

(JL)

Chronophobia

The Japanese Gutai artist Atsuko Tanaka gave up figurative painting when hospitalised in 1953. 'I wrote down the dates – four or five days – until my release', he said, 'and coloured around them with crayon. I thought: This *is* painting. I subsequently drew calendars, and the compositions of numbers drawn with crayon on linen. Linen, which is a simple material, is accepted by everybody with little resistance.'[5] As the numbers were written down, they 'gave form to time'.[6] Ming Tiampo in her essay 'Electrifying Painting', describes how the artist was disorientated by the sameness in the routine of hospital life and how the counting of the days until his release needed to be visualised.

Two *Calendar* paintings emerged at the time, in 1954. The *Calendar*s are paper collages, one with ink and pencil in the format of a portrait, the other one, landscape format, with oil and ink. Measuring 38 x 54 cm each, they are ordinary calendars 'elevated' into works of art, and sit outside the discussion of realism versus abstraction. And since their complex process involved the use of the architectural blueprint, they become 'a palimpsest of semiotic systems: spatial, temporal, numeric, and linguistic, thus highlighting the spatiality of how a calendar represents time'.[7] Interestingly, Tiampo notes that, 'this collision of semiotic systems revealed their arbitrariness and materiality, by revealing how the same shape could simultaneously represent part of a building or part of a letter [and thus a day].'[8]



Atsuko Tanaka, *Calendar,* ca. 1954. Ink and pencil on paper, collage. Collection Ashiya City Museum of Art & History. © Kanayama Akira and Tanaka Atsuko Association.

A sort of animation mechanism is indicated here, whereby the calendar's virtual plasticity becomes a translation tool. It opens up a lexicon of 'forms' and sensitises us to the calendar as an encounter of difference, plurality and adaptability within its environment.

According to Victoria Browne, 'calendar time is a tool for coordinating and managing social, economic, and political life'.[9] Among others, Browne draws references to 'Hannah Arendt's pluralistic concept of the "public" as a basis for developing a "deepened" account of calendar time as a public time', in order to explore 'the complex temporal dynamics and sociopolitical processes underpinning calendar time … Such an account is not premised upon assumptions about neutrality, universality and uniformity, but rather, upon the need and desire for temporal coordination within and across diversity.'[10]

Particular attention is drawn to the day, which can 'seem to be the most natural of measures. Yet, as sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel insists, a day is *always* at root an 'artificial' segmentation of time, whether measured by a sundial, a mechanical timepiece such as a watch, or marked by a number in a calendrical grid (1981, 11)… The calendar "day", "month" and "year" can only ever be approximate representations of the "physiotemporal" relations between the earth and the sun, or in the case of lunar calendars, between earth and moon (Zerubavel 1997, 110). The key point, however, is not primarily about physiotemporal or astronomical *accuracy*. The point is that temporal measures are not natural measures that simply exist; rather, they are *constructed* measures that are decided upon and utilized within specific sociocultural situations and arrangements.'[11]

Tanaka's calendar time in that respect brings forth an abundance of the natural–artificial binary, identified here as being the ontological core of 'temporal measures': the *Calendar*s reveal themselves as a strange complexity and physiology, with the artist's body (restoration, healing) intricately there.

(VG)

RAM: Random Access Memory

Random Access Memory is a type of computer memory that can be accessed randomly. This means that any byte can be accessed without touching the preceding bytes.



Example of writable volatile random-access memory. Wikimedia Commons.

We can understand RAM in its relation to storage on the one hand and the processor on the other. Accessing data from the RAM may create some latency, but it is faster than retrieving data from the storage of the hard drive. Asking experts to explain RAM in layman's terms results in a range of illustrating analogies of which this is my favourite example:

Imagine your computer like an enormous building full of employees and different office departments. The purpose of the whole company is to deliver paperwork containing certain words to other buildings (this would be analogous to information that is sent to the screen, speakers and other peripherals).The main department (analogous to the microprocessor) is the smallest one, but it's also where action takes place. Here, employees read and write lots and lots of papers very quickly, all the time, and they are the only ones able to do this. But when these papers are not being read or written, they must be stored somewhere else, because there is only so much space on the small tables of this department, and you can't just drop papers or pile them on the floor. So there is another department (analogous to RAM) which has more physical space, and this is where all papers are temporarily kept, ready to be transferred from/to the main department (CPU) whenever required.[12]

Some of this extensive reading and writing that take place in the computer is 'occult' – never visible to the user of the programmes running on the computer. Some of it is authored by the user and, once

written, is saved in a hard drive for later retrieval.

Another interesting trait of RAM is its volatility – the data it holds is deleted when power is turned off. Is this instant forgetting something that is similar to, or what distinguishes RAM from human memory? Freud in his 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad' (a device for recording information involving celluloid-covered wax, which Freud compares to the human memory), he writes:

There must come a point at which the analogy between anauxiliary apparatus of this kind and the organ which is its prototypewill cease to apply. It is true, too, that once the writing has been erased,the Mystic Pad cannot 'reproduce' it from within; it would be a mysticpad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that.[13]

Wendy Chun underlines the fact that digital storage is not as reliable as we would like to think: links turn dead, software becomes out-dated and servers break down, creating what has oxymoronically been called 'enduring ephemerals'.[14] One might also assume that all human memory is random and unreliable (not just in the sense of Derrida's comment, based on his reading of Freud, that there is no true presence or origin of impressions but only differences), but in the sense that you never truly know – just as the computer doesn't know – what ought to be remembered and when. Facebook tries.

Random Access Memories is the fourth studio album by the French electronic music duo Daft Punk.

(AKI)

Real-time

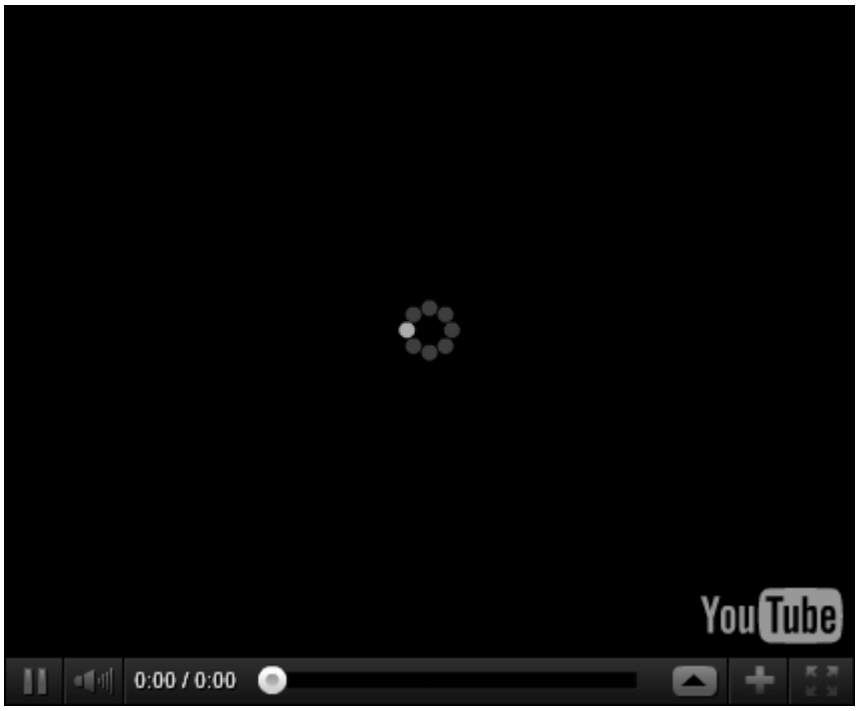
The phrase 'real-time' seems to encapsulate the contemporary condition in which demand for ever-faster transactions and instantaneous feedback is delivered by informational technologies across global networks 24/7. This is critical for the operations of contemporary capitalism more broadly – not forgetting art festivals and biennials – that need to constantly update themselves.

Real-time computation underpins this cultural logic, as well as the wider applications of just-in-time economic production, yet there is little attention in the art world – aside from the real-time systems aesthetics of Jack Burnham from the late 1960s perhaps[15] – to how this influences aesthetic practices outside of the register of 'liveness' (of what constitutes 'live art'). More useful, at least to us, is a more precise conception of liveness in relation to computer-programming environments – thinking not so much of Philip Auslander's book *Liveness* but the degrees of liveness introduced by computer scientist Steve Tanimoto.[16] For instance, the liveness in programming is characterised by the ability to interact with a running system (that is not stopped while waiting for new programme statements). According to Wendy Chun, programming is full of such acts of 'sourcery', demonstrations of imaginative potential based on the (undead) logic of programmability that seeks 'to shape and to predict – indeed to embody – a future based on past data'.[17]

The artistic practice of 'live coding' (sometimes referred to as 'on-the-fly programming' or 'just in time programming') can also be understood in this way – changing rules at runtime – as attempts to reanimate dead materials, and subject them to real-time dynamics and the unpredictability, contingency and messiness of making things happen in real-time.[18]

Put simply, real-time refers to the effect of information being delivered seemingly as it happens. In computing, it serves to describe the computer processing time – the actual time that elapses in the performance of a computation by a computer – in which the operation appears to be immediate and able to correspond instantaneously to an external process, as for example, with the fluctuations of financial markets that operate at the level of micro or nanoseconds – attuned to the clock-time of the machine. Yet there is always a degree of delay in the system, an endless deferral of real time that we should more precisely call 'nearly real-time'. Real-time only ever describes this deferral between the occurrence of an event and the use of the processed data, indicated by the buffering effects when streaming audio or video

data from the internet.



Buffering, screen grab, online source.

It is the machine that is now crucial in producing our experience of real-time. We include these considerations because the experience of real-time (not to mention the way in which the notion has entered our everyday language) and thus of co-presence through computational technologies – or rather *pseudo-co-presence* – is a decisive factor in the coming into being of contemporaneity. And this testifies to a change in our experience of time itself.

(GC)

Presentism

'Presentism' should not be confused with 'the present'. It describes a time-relation that has no temporal horizon other than itself. Presentism is a crisis of time, the sense that only the present exists, a present defined at once by what historian François Hartog calls 'the tyranny of the instant and by the treadmill of an unending now',[19] a capacity only for a short-term perspective. As Boris Groys remarks: 'Today, we are stuck in the present as it reproduces itself without leading to any future.'[20]

François Hartog has tried to come to terms with the meaning of the phenomenon of presentism through the notion of 'Regimes of historicity'. Historicity means the way in which individuals or groups 'situate themselves and develop in time'[21] and it is therefore closely related to the concept of *Eigenzeit*. The notion of 'regimes of historicity' refers to the way in which the relationship between past, present and future is articulated, and the order of time that can be derived from it thus differs depending on whether the category of the past, the future or the present is dominant.[22] The notion of regimes of historicity, understood as the articulation of the relationship between past, present and future, whther in a macro- or micro-historical sense, is therefore a useful tool to elucidate different experiences and ways of being in time – asking which present is operative in different places and at different times, and to which past and future is it connected?

Hartog sees a contemporary regime of historicity, where the past and the future are regenerated only to valorise the immediate, as replacing the modern one, where the present and the past were conceived in

terms of the future. Hartog, however, deals almost exclusively with time experiences within a European framework, that is, in the singular.

As noted in the entry on the *contemporary* contemporary, what I find crucial about our present, the *present* present, is that it is conditioned by *con*-temporaneity, understood as the interconnection of *different* presents in the same present. The present ways of articulating past, present, and future therefore not only makes our present, here and now, different from previous presents, but it also testifies to a change in our experience of time itself; an experience of an ever expanding, perpetual present – even though this presentist present is obviously experienced very differently, depending on one's geopolitical situation, position in society, etc. To some it is about acceleration and mobility, to others, the precariat, it is about stagnation and enclosure without any projects aimed at a different future. Jacques Rancière interestingly claims that 'prior to being a line stretching from the past to the future, time is a form of distribution of human beings, a form of division between those who have time and those who do not'.[23]

In general, today, we have lost the modern belief in linear historical progression and all societies moving towards a better future. It is a kind of internal retreat of the modern to the present, and contemporaneousness is now what Terry Smith has called, 'the pregnant present of the original meaning of *modern*, but without its subsequent contract with the future'.[24] The future is no longer perceived as a promise, but rather as a threat. The future is a time of uncertainties and disasters; disasters which, moreover, are caused by ourselves as our behaviour has substantially influenced the atmosphere and geology of planet Earth. The virtual effacement of the categories of the past and the future means that the present is omnipresent, but if presence is all there is, then nothing is present any longer. Presentism names the dissolvement of presence and the present. Today, we are therefore confronted with the challenge of thinking or imagining a qualitatively different future, a collective protention, which transcends the all-encompassing temporal horizon of presentism, but without falling back into the synchronising and universalising discourse of progress that characterises Western modernity, where those who do not comply with its parameters are excluded and where progress is defined in terms of the projection of certain – that is, Western – people's presents as other people's futures.

(JL)

Arrested movement / Ark

Arrested movement: movement that is imprisoned, does not progress, is blocked, delayed, obstructed, confused. The adjective 'arrested' explicitly links to questions of someone/something being seized by an authority, sovereignty.

Gigi Scaria, *The Ark*, 2015. Video duration: 3min 36sec. Single channel with sound. Size: 32' TV monitor. © the artist.

Gigi Scaria, *Voyage*, 2015. Video duration: 3min 36sec. Single channel with sound. Size: 32' TV monitor. © the artist.

Gigi Scaria, *Trapped*, 2015. Video duration: 3min 36sec. Single channel with sound. Size: 32' TV monitor. © the artist.

New Delhi-based artist Gigi Scaria pursues enquiries into time through 'social mapping' – whether territorial, cultural, environmental or of the hierarchies and systems of global communities. Inclusive to the work are themes of migration, community collapse, the beauty in labour and collaboration, and layers of ancient cultures as they are subsumed in the world's mega-cities. And there are 'memories and histories of our "time" [slipping] into the whirlpool of change, which is only understood by the notion called "speed".'[25] Scaria's three animation works from 2015, *The Ark*, *Trapped* and *Voyage*, subtly refer to slow violence, impoverished visions of streaming, an ecological expression of memory, and nonhuman time. As condensed images, they include a single technological remnant of the age that has passed by.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Language Gulf In the Shouting Valley*, 2013. Installation extract. Courtesy the artist.

In Lawrence Abu Hamdan's audio essay and audiovisual installation, *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013), the voice of a small community inhabiting the border between Palestine/Israel and Syria is doubled – potentially multiplied. 'Listening closely to the oral border produced by this transnational community, in one voice we can simultaneously hear the collaborator and the traitor; the translator and the transgressor.'[26]

Think territorial time!

(VG)

Migration

I am interested in the term *Migration* because of its flexibility, describing at the same time the movement of physical objects, animals, humans, and of immaterial information or data from one location to another. It is said that migration has defined our age, perhaps more than any other single issue in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which have been characterised by prolonged global mobility on a massive scale. Global migration and its effects are reshaping the world, to the extent that in many areas, this level of mobility has created a new normal or status quo that challenges the idea of the nation state and old notions of collective core identities and mainstream cultures.[27]

In our age of mobility, the practices of the archive, whose important task is to categorise and store materials in the right place, are undergoing change, whether institutionally, hermeneutically or technically.

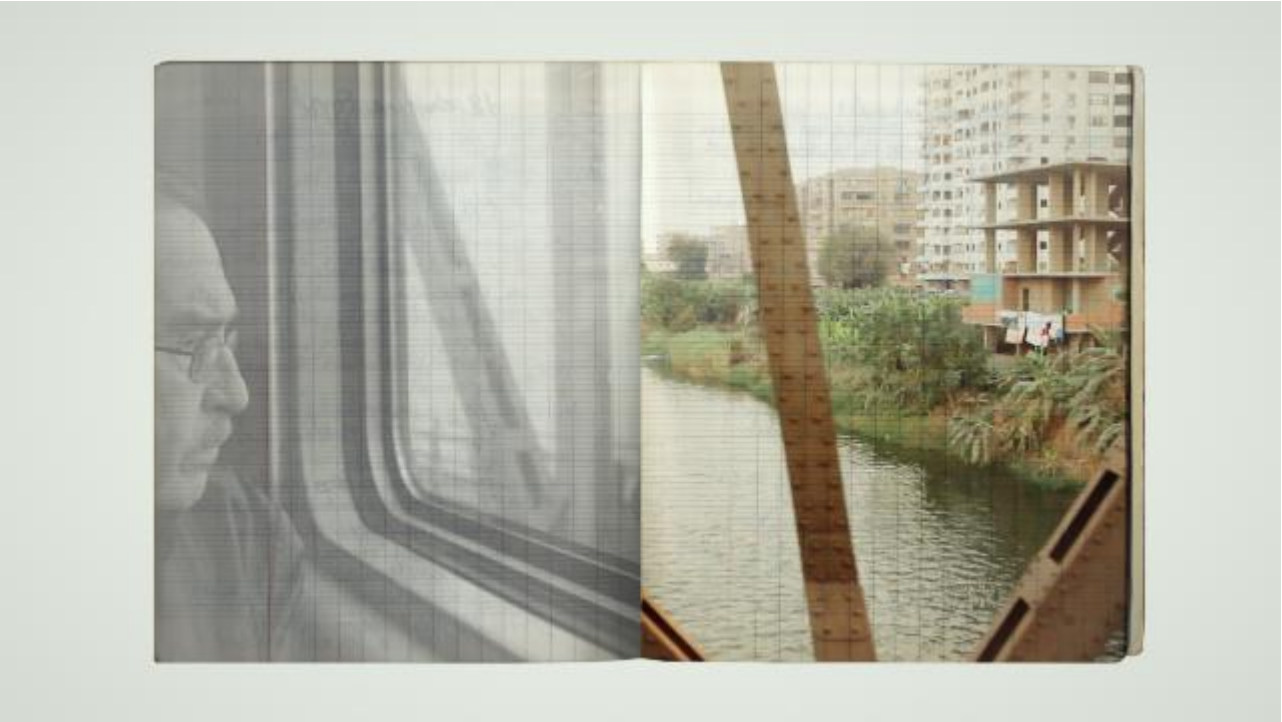
Arjun Appadurai has commented that moving images meet mobile audiences, following up this statement with his idea of diasporic archives:

The newer forms of electronic archiving restore the deep link of the archive to popular memory and its practices, returning to the non-official actor the capability to choose the way in which traces and documents shall be formed into archives, whether at the level of the family, the neighbourhood, the community or other sorts of groupings outside the demography of the state.[28]

Wolfgang Ernst coins the term *dynarchive* to denote the condition of permanent change, constant updating and migration of contents in digital collections. He suggests that through the acceleration of data-storage and data-migration in the digital technologies (hardware and software) the traditional spatial and temporal difference between the archive and the present is erased.[29] Nonetheless, Ernst warns us not to be fooled by the non-archival appearances of new media: in their techno-mathematical structures, the spectre of the archive recurs more strongly than ever – through the tracking and data-mining of the protocol, one might add, having Alexander Galloway in mind.

When Danish artist, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld looked into the archive of Armenian-Egyptian photographer Armand, and was confronted with the many transformations and layers of information that had been put together, she realised that she could not just turn to 'the thing itself', to what we might call the pure archive:

When I went to Cairo, I thought I was making a film about memory, retrieving the memory of Philippe [son of Armand], but also of a whole period in Egypt's history, which to a certain extent is unavailable to the present. But it occurred to me that the project was becoming less about memory as storage, with or without access, but rather about memory as a process of re-materialization and migration.'[30]



Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, *Leap into Colour*, 2015. Still from video, courtesy the artist.

In a number of artworks and exhibitions, personal experiences of migration and travelling are told through objects that serve as testimony. Examples are Ibrahim Mahama's cocoa sacks bearing traces of its trade, transport and transformation into artworks; Dahn Vo's exhibition 'Slip of the Tongue' in Venice 2015, which weaved together a personal family story of immigration with the migration of artefacts and artworks; and Walead Besthy's *Travel Pictures* – photographic negatives 'damaged' by security X-rays. These works emphasise in different ways the interconnection between personal experiences of migration, exchange of capital and goods, and the circulation of artworks that proves not to be innocent.

(AKI)

Algo-rhythm

In mathematics and computer science, an 'algorithm' is a self-contained step-by-step set of operations to be performed (such as calculation, data processing, or automated reasoning tasks), and has its origins in ninth-century Baghdad, in Arabic algebra and arithmetic:[31]

خوارزمی

More than simply an expression of formal logic, algorithms do things in the world through their command structure to accomplish a decisive action with material effects and seem to play an ever-increasing role in our daily lives.[32]

Algorithms operate in time, and are part of larger assemblages and infrastructures that are also constantly evolving and subject to variable conditions and contingencies – part of complex assemblages that include data, data structures and bodies, that together are part of a process of new forms of

automation that captures time and living labour.

The relation between algorithms and capital thus becomes a crucial site of enquiry, where apparently simple operations such as searches or feeds – think of Google's PageRank or Facebook's EdgeRank algorithms – order data and reify information and knowledge in ways that are determined by corporate interests. Technical, social, human and nonhuman layers are folded together – into what Tiziana Terranova calls an 'infrastructure of autonomization' [33] or Benjamin Bratton 'The Stack'[34] – to produce new layers of subjectivation at multiple scales.

Algorithms, then, can be said to produce measurable temporal effects, and they are generated by micro-temporal performative operations at a range of scales. More precisely, they do not simply determine an ensuing event but also a movement and rhythm of signals that oscillate between various materialities. This is what Shintaro Miyazaki refers to with his wordplay 'algorhythmics': on the one hand a finite sequence of step-by-step instructions, a procedure for solving a problem, and on the other a temporal ordering of infinite movement of matter, bodies and signals. [35] To Miyazaki, algorhythmics is a critical (media archaeological) concept that reveals epistemic aspects of computational processes otherwise largely overlooked. And as part of this, more precise scientific terminology is useful to describe creative processes: 'clock' or 'pulse' for instance. What unfolds, within the rhythm of algorithms, is a reordering of time itself that can no longer be considered to unfold in a particular order or sequence of actions.

If this reminds us that machines are running sequences and processes that are carefully orchestrated, and that reflect contemporary conditions, then we might begin to compose them differently, and produce other kinds of imaginaries.

(GC)

Iconomy

Anthropologist Marc Augé writes of a new condition of radical contemporaneity between peoples and cultures. This condition makes it no longer possible to construct the otherness of so-called 'primitive societies', subaltern groups, and non-Western cultures, and to attribute lateness to these, as the speed of cultural, economic and migratory circulation has inaugurated *a generalized sharing of time*.[36] In the fourth thesis of *The Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord claims that 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.'[37] The term 'iconomy' refers to the global circulation of images, including the way in which art now constitutes a *trans*national currency. The generalised sharing of time is – among other things – established through a sharing of images and symbols or a shared relation to the same, or some of the same, images and symbols. It is to a large extent mediated by images.

The global circulation that characterises the iconomy – in which if not all then most images today take part – means that an image not only has one context but several contexts at the same time; they are now everywhere at once rather than belonging to a singular context or place. This raises the question of *the quality* and character of this sharing, since the image circulation in contemporary media culture, not least on the internet – which I gather under the term 'iconomy' to signal its deep imbrication in the globalised capitalist economy – is closely related to what Hito Steyerl terms 'circulationism'. Rather than the art of making images, circulationism is connected with the post-production, launching and acceleration of images, and with the public relations of images across social networks that both establish and tear apart 'communities loosely linked by shared attention deficit'.[38] If, as Debord claims, the society of the spectacle is an expropriation of our images, of our capacity to communicate and take part in symbolic exchange, then there is an urgent need to re-appropriate the images, to address this circulationism and its work of mediation. In a Debordian analysis this work destroys our capacity for

collective imagination, but the shared and interconnected present – that is, the condition of contemporaneity – also holds a potential.

In trying to point out this potential it seems fruitful to theorize the phenomenon of the iconomy and global image-circulation in connection to the concept of trans-individuation, developed by Bernard Stiegler. According to Stiegler the Aristotelian definition of the human being as a political animal means that I am only human insofar as I belong to a social group:[39] 'This sociality is the framework of a becoming: the group, and the individual in that group, never cease to seek out their path. This search *constitutes* human time. And if the time of the *I* is certainly not the time of the *we*, it takes place within the time of the *we*, which is itself conditioned by the time of the *I*s of which it is composed.'[40] These two dimensions of the temporality of the political animal are tied together by what Stiegler calls 'trans-individuation'. Trans-individuation designates processes of co-individuation within media or symbolic environments in which the 'I' and the 'we' participate and are transformed through one another.[41] It thus conditions all social transformation, and the individual's participation in the social also implies a participation in the much vaster individuation of the very media, language, images etc. through which we communicate[42] – that is, the media that interconnect and make us contemporaneous. The image explosion of our current globalised and digitised society of the spectacle constitutes an inescapable iconomy, that mediates and governs our imagination and occasions what Stiegler would call a dis-individuation, but it also constitutes a generally shared image-environment, a 'visual bond' (Vertov), that is a potential medium for large-scale transindividuation, in and through which we might become able to create collective imaginations, that transcend the present and break with presentism.[43]

(JL)

Pre(-acceleration)

Pre as in Erin Manning's *Preacceleration: a postscript on the phenomenon and cultural movement of accelerationism*. Accelerationism claims that capitalism should be expanded and accelerated to generate radical social change, using existing infrastructure as a platform to 'repurpose post-capitalist, collective ends'.[44]

Preacceleration is how the political philosopher Erin Manning in her book *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, 2009 defines incipient movement. This is emergent movement – movement as it begins to happen or develop. Movement that is in its process of becoming form yet has not taken a shape. Movement's incipience, if we follow Manning, escapes the confinement of movement in conceptual, disciplinary and representational settings. Instead of the various ways of taking form, incipient movement prompts us to a prior question and state, namely, to understand the 'how to conceive of taking form itself'.[45] It is an approach to movement in its basic phases of initiation before its actualisation. It is a hint to micromovements, rhythm, for instance, 'alive at the phase where a particular shape has not yet taken hold.'[46] Choreography and animation are among practices through which Manning arrives at a conception of incipient movement that withdraws from actual movement, which she says is always 'reduced to very specific conditions and … acted upon by its co-constitutive surroundings (including gravity)'.[47] Preacceleration is 'a movement of the not-yet that composes the more-than-one'.[48]

Manning's reference to dance and animation is Norman McLaren with his works *Pas de Deux* (1968) and *Begone Dull Care* (1949): animations of lines in the moment of becoming 'figural'. But perhaps one can find a similar economy of preacceleration in less abstract moving-image work too, or where abstraction happens on a different level, where abstraction is read in other ways.

And one can ask: in what way does pre-acceleration evoke a certain pre-temporal condition? Paradoxical as it sounds, this could be a potentially interesting theoretical challenge of today's temporal condition.

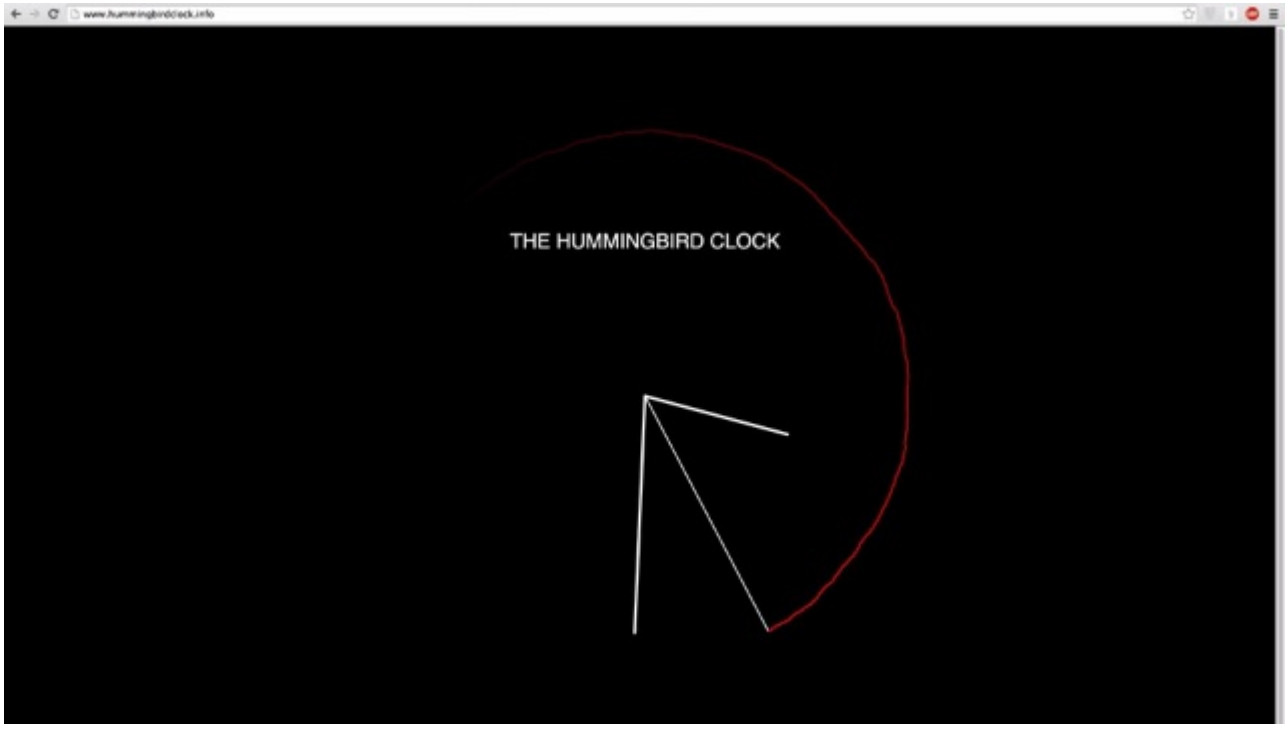
(VG)

Timestamp

A timestamp is a sequence of characters or encoded information identifying when a certain event occurred, usually giving date and time of day, sometimes accurate to a small fraction of a second. The term derives from rubber stamps used in offices to stamp the current date, and sometimes time, in ink on paper documents, to record when the document was received. Common examples of this type of timestamp are a postmark on a letter or the 'in' and 'out' times on a time card.

In modern times usage of the term has expanded to refer to digital date and time information attached to digital data. For example, computer files contain timestamps that tell when the file was last modified, and digital cameras add timestamps to the pictures they take, recording the date and time the picture was taken.[49]

Timestamps are used as evidence that testifies to the exact sequence or simultaneity of events. In a work that was on view in Liverpool as part of the Biennial, artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan adopted techniques usually used for forensic evidence in criminal cases. His work *Hummingbird Clock* was located physically outside the law courts in Derby Square, and online at www.hummingbirdclock.info. Designed as a tool for investigations into civil and human rights violations, the clock records the second-by-second variations of the buzz made by the electrical grid. The sound files are made available online, so that the public can analyse the date and time of any recording made within earshot of the grid, in case they need to know whether the recording has been tampered with. The humming collected and presented is a timestamp in itself, and every digital audio recording from the area can be identified on a timeline through comparison with this hum.



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Hummingbird Clock,* 2016. Film still, Liverpool Biennial 2016.

Time-stamping is a kind of metadata – data about the data – which is increasingly significant in tandem with the constant circulation and migration of data (and objects). It records, creation, purpose, author, location in the computer (or archive), file size, standards etc.

Within contemporary art this kind of specification is in many cases what *makes* the work, since it establishes the ontology of the work and the basis of our reception of it: what is it that we see? How should we look at it? What does it relate to and how?

Through time-stamping it may be possible to discover recordings of events that have taken place but of which you have no evidence.This is the case for Mark Leckey whose video work *Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD* was also part of the Liverpool Biennial. He explains that when he found a recording of a particular Joy Division concert that he attended as a fifteen-year-old, he began to think, or fantasise, that 'through audiosoftware [he] might be able to find [himself] in the recording. I was watching youTube and thinking FUCK. If that's online, then maybe everything is now online and I can find everything that I remember.'[50]



Mark Leckey, *Dream English Kid,* 1964 – 1999 AD, 2015. Installation view at Blade Factory. Photo: Mark McNulty.

Sven Spieker in his reflections on the use of archives in modern and contemporary art states: 'Archives do not simply reconnect us with what we have lost. Instead, they remind us … of what we have never possessed in the first place.'[51]

(AKI)

Loop

Real-time operations, algo-rhythms, and recursive functions such as loops offer alternative epistemological perspectives and imaginaries, as for instance in the ancient image of a serpent eating its own tail. In computer programming, a loop– the iterative principle – and certain recursive procedures allows repeated execution of a fragment of source code that continues until a given condition is met (true or false in Boolean logic). A loop becomes an infinite loop if a condition never becomes FALSE. There are different types of loops: which loops, for loops, infinite loops or strange loops, to name only a few). Below

is an example of a while loop written in Python (not the serpent but the programming language):

```
time = 'true'
while (time):
print 'endless loop'
```

Running the endless loops script, produced by author, video.

In a so-called Turing machine, a loop contains an ending, at least in theory. In '... Else Loop Forever', Wolfgang Ernst develops this discussion in relation to what he refers to as 'untimeliness'.[52] His starting point is the infamous 'halting problem' that underpins Turing computation – the problem of whether a computer programme, given all possible inputs, will finish running or continue to run forever. It was Turing's assertion, in his famous 1936/37 essay 'On Computable Numbers', that a general algorithm to solve the halting problem is not possible and this led to the mathematical definition of a computer and programme, which became known as the Turing machine.[53] (And it is worth emphasising that computation is understood this way: not in terms of what it can do but of what it *cannot*.) This decision or halting problem – or 'problem of ending' as Ernst puts it – underscores broader notions of algorithmic time and the way computation anticipates its own sense of never ending in an endless loop. That there is 'no happy ending' allows Ernst to elaborate on new temporal structures that are no longer aligned to traditional narrative structures (like history). Contrary to the traditional performance – with beginning, middle and end – Ernst points out, a computational recording can be replayed endlessly: 'with no internal sense of ending'; as a 'time-critical condition'.[54] (A Biennial that unfolds through episodes might make similar claims.)

For related reasons we are captivated by the apparent simplicity of the graphical spinning wheel icon of a 'throbber' that indicates when a computer programme is performing an action such as downloading content or performing intensive calculations. In contrast to the teleology of a progress bar, a throbber does not convey how much of the action has been completed and thus resonates with our understanding of the real-time dynamics of the contemporary condition and the ambiguity of the multiple temporal registers that are running at the same time.



Throbber, screen grab, online source.

(GC)

[1] The key concepts are derived from 'The Contemporary Condition', a research project at Aarhus University made possible by a grant from the Danish Council for Independent Research, which runs for three years from September 2015 to August 2018. This forms a glossary of sorts, somewhat in the tradition of Raymond Williams' *Keywords*: a lexicon, a database (or, we might be so bold as to suggest that there are echoes of Adorno's collections of aphorisms 'Minima Moralia'). More to the point we'd like to think there's something very 'timely' or 'contemporary' about the approach we are taking, and a presentation format that reflects the object of study as something nonlinear, somewhat *episodic*, collective and unfinished, open to contestation and further development. We offer twelve

key concepts here that we hope help to frame the discussion of contemporaneity and introduce a shared vocabulary to inform further discussions; not least, of how events such as conferences and biennials in themselves act as agents of 'contemporaneity'.

[2] Benjamin H. Bratton, 'The Black Stack', *e-flux journal* #53 (March 2014), accessed August 24, 2016. See also his recently published *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[3] J.T. Fraser: 'An Embarrassment of Proper Times: A Foreword', in Helga Nowotny, *Time. The Modern and Postmodern Experience* [*Eigenzeit: Entstehung und Strukturierung eines Zeitgefühls*, 1989], trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p.5.

[4] Peter Osborne: 'The Distributed Image', in *Texte zur Kunst* 99, September 2015, p.80.

[5] Atsuko Tanaka, quoted in Ming Tiampo (ed.) *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954–1968*, essays by Mizuho Kat? and Ming Tiampo, foreword by Lynn Gumpert and Scott Watson (New York and Vancouver: The Grey Art Gallery, New York University and The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1970), p.104.

[6] Ming Tiampo, 'Electrifying Painting', ibid., p.66.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Victoria Browne, *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), chapter 4, 'Calendar Tim,', pp.99–100.

[10] Both quotes ibid., p.100.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Answer posted by Jorge A. Berrueta, 'In laymans terms, what is the difference between RAM and a computer processor?,' accessed December 20, 2016.

[13] Sigmund Freud 'A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad' (1925), in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XIX, 230, quoted by Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2005), p.286.

[14] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory', in *Critical Inquiry* 35 (University of Chicago Press, Autumn 2008), pp. 148–71.

[15] Jack Burnham, 'Systems Esthetics', *Artforum* 7:1 (Sep 1968): pp.30–35.

[16] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Steven L. Tanimoto, 'Viva: A visual language for image processing', *Journal of Visual Languages & Computing*, 1(2) 1990, pp.127–39.

[17] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p.xii.

[18] For more on live coding, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_coding and https://toplap.org/.

[19] François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), XV.

[20] Boris Groys, 'Comrades of Time'.

[21] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

[22] Ibid., XVI.

[23] Jacques Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity', *Diacritics* vol. 42, no. 3 (2014), p.8.

[24] Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006), p.703. The contemporary extension of the present as substituting for the temporal logic of modernity is also stressed by Boris Groys: 'The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control [...] Today, we are stuck in the present as it reproduces itself without leading to any future.' Boris Groys, 'Comrades of Time', in *Going Public*, p.90.

[25] Gigi Scaria, on his exhibition, Time, Laumeier Sculpture Park, Saint Louis, Missouri, April 16–August 14, 2016, accessed May 2016.

[26] ' … about the politics of language and the conditions of voice faced by the Druze community living between Palestine/Israel and Syria. Recordings of the Druze Soldiers working as interpreters in the Israeli Military Court system in the West Bank and Gaza are contrasted with recordings from the Shouting Valley, Golan Heights, where the Druze population gather on both sides of the Israeli/ Syrian Border and shout across the jurisdictions to family and friends on the other-side. By inhabiting the border between Syria and Israel and Palestine the Druze complicate the solid divide. If we listen closely to the oral border produced by this transnational community, in one voice we can simultaneously hear the collaborator and the traitor; the translator and the transgressor.' Accessed September 2016, http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/#/langugae-gulf-in-th...

[27] Interdisciplinary.net, A Global Network for Dynamic Research and Publishing, Conference Call, accessed 20 December 2016.

[28] Arjun Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration', in Joke Brouwer & Arjen Mulder, *Information is Alive* (Rotterdam: V2/NAI 2002), p.18.

[29] Wolfgang Ernst, 'Temporalizing the Present and Archiving Presence. The Impact of Time-Critical Media Technologies', lecture given at Concordia University, Montreal (Canada), 2014.

[30] Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, *Time in the Making. Rehearsing Reparative Critical Practices*, Ph.D. Thesis (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2015), p.19.

[31] The Arabic source, *al-?w?rizm?* 'the man of ?w?rizm' (now Khiva), was a name given to the ninth-century mathematician Ab? Ja'far Muhammad ibn M?sa, author of widely translated works on algebra and arithmetic; Persian: ?????????, c. 780–850. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm.

[32] See Andrew Goffey, 'Algorithm', in *Software Studies – a Lexicon*, ed. Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

[33] Tiziana Terranova, 'Red Stack Attack! Algorithms, capital and the automation of the common', *Effimera* (2014).

[34] Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[35] Shintaro Miyazaki, 'Algorhythmics: Understanding Micro-Temporality', *Computational Culture* issue 2 (2012).

[36] Marc Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.50.

[37] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994 [1967]).

[38] Hito Steyerl, 'Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?' in *e-flux journal* #49 (November 2013), p. 7, accessed May 25, 2015.

[39] See Bernard Stiegler: 'How I Became a Philosopher', in *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), 3f.

[40] Ibid.

[41] See Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, 'Transindividuation', in *e-flux journal* #14, March 2010, 01/06. Accessed May 22, 2012.

[42] See Bernard Stiegler: 'Technics, Media, Teleology. Interview with Bernard Stiegler', in *Theory, Culture & Society* vol. 24 (7–8), 2007, p.335.

[43] The localisation of such a potential is for instance resonant with a remark made by Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Terry Smith that: 'The big question of the twenty-first century is how to foster collective action. In the age of the Internet, the potential to join, to come to a shared engagement, is there.' Terry Smith, *Talking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2015), p.121.

[44] Marlen Vargas Del Razo, video caption, accessed September 2016.

[45] Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009),

p.5.

[46] Erin Manning, 'In a nutshell,' ROROTOKO, Erin Manning: On her book *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, Cover Interview of April 14, 2010, unpaginated, accessed December 2016.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Manning, 2009, chapter 'Incipient Action: The Dance of the Not-Yet,' 13–28: 13. See also Manning, 'Coda. Interlude: Animation's Dance,' in *hambre, espacio cine experimental*, November 2014, accessed December 2016.

[49] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timestamp, accessed December 20, 2016.

[50] Artist presentation on the occasion of the Liverpool Biennial, accessed December 20, 2016.

[51] Sven Spieker: *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p.3.

[52] Wolfgang Ernst, '"... Else Loop Forever." The Untimeliness of Media', (2009).

[53] Alan M. Turing, 'On computable numbers, with an application to the Entscheidungsproblem', Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society, 2: 42 (1937), pp. 230–65.

[54] Ernst, '"... Else Loop Forever." The Untimeliness of Media.'

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