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INTRODUCTION

INTERSECTING MEMORIES AND ACTIVATING TEMPORALITIES

PAULA RIBEIRO LOBO (ED.) 

Our relation with the notion of time, ever volatile, seems to be shifting again. Since the systematisation and measuring procedures introduced by the industrialisation of labour, there have been numerous apparatuses developed and put into practice to organise our life in modern society according to temporal coordinates. Yet, clock time may not match the perception of passing hours. And eras may not adjust to calendar divisions. One hundred years ago, on 6th April 1922, Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson had the most illustrious debate on the nature of time itself, with clashing perspectives that drew on science and culture and which have since inspired numerous theoretical stands. Though past, present and future still constitute the general parameters we refer to, the concepts and layers convoked when considering the duration and simultaneity of time, in its relation to history, memory and action are many. For us, living in 2022 – still dealing with Covid global pandemic and now abruptly facing the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a new war in Europe that violates established humanitarian rules and international law by the hour – time has become an even more unstable and ungraspable notion.

Time is far from being a novel theme and the division of time is of considerable importance for scholars. For instance, while historians often refer to the “short 20th century”, marking it between 1914 and 1991 (or 2001), for art historians the pace of the 20th century was set by earlier by avant garde movements, particularly since Picasso painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* in 1907 and Cubism broke through canon. Time is also, of course, a raw material of representation, as exemplified by Niépce's early photographic experiments in the first half of the 19th century. Never ceasing to inspire artworks, this raw material became matter for

vast, complex articulations. In the last century, examples span from De Chirico's *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (1909) to On Kawara's *Today* series (1966-2014), or Martin Creed's *Work No. 189. Thirty-nine metronomes beating time. one at every speed* (1998); from Christian Marclay's 24-hour long cinematic installation *The Clock* (2010) to Anthony Gormley's *Another Time* (1999-2013) – this latter piece being a series of solid iron figures dispersed around the world, which, in their stillness, interrogate the flow of lived time.

Focussing both on the diverse perceptions of time and on the cultural differences in the construction of time, twenty years ago MoMA presented *Tempo* (2002) – an exhibition that addressed phenomenological, empirical, political and fictional aspects related to time. It organised artworks into five sections: Time Collapsed, Transgressive Bodies, Liquid Time, Trans-histories and Mobility/Immobility. Since then there have been numerous curatorial proposals focused on time and some of which might be usefully recalled. For example, *Time Frame*, presented in 2006 by P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center – a group exhibition which curated artworks since the late 1960's (by Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Roni Horn and Hiroshi Sugimoto, among others) to explore “the compression, extension and mirroring of time”. More recently, in 2019, Ralph Rugoff, the curator of the 58th International Art Exhibition of Venice Biennale, chose the theme “May you Live in Interesting Times” (an expression that was for long wrongly considered as an ancient Chinese curse), to “reassess our terms of reference” for cyclical crisis, facts, fiction and political discourse. The same year, Centre Pompidou reexamined the Bergsonian notion of long duration with *Préhistoire, une Énigme Moderne* – an exhibition structured around the modern idea of pre-history, that aimed to reflect upon how the concept has fascinated artists and contributed to modern and contemporary artistic representations.

From a theoretical perspective, time has been a core topic of reflection and discussion for centuries. Discontinuities, anachronisms, dischronisms, paradoxes, appropriations, movements, repetitions, static images, intervals, performativity, a myriad of analyses have addressed the spaces and tensions in between *chronos* and *kairos*. Since time interferes with our notion of contemporaneity, philosophical theorisations based on the artworld have been consistently put forward. In his reflection on recent uses of the term “contemporary”, Terry Smith¹ claims that “our time, to which we necessarily belong, and which we share like or not, is no longer a time for us”. Drawing from the discussions put forward by Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Néstor García Canclini, Peter Osborne and Jean-Philippe Antoine, Smith concludes that “the art to come can arrive as much from one of our pasts, or from the past of another, as it might be arriving from the future. In fact, art to come is already here; it has been with us for some time”².

Images have the power to activate temporalities³, as Mieke Bal proposes with the notion of hetero-temporality, resulting from the encounter of political and aesthetical positions. Envisaging artworks as Bergsonian acts, in the sense that they “appeal to recognition as well as to the surprise of innovation” and require

relational looking to be politically effective, Bal reminds us that if time is the motor of memory and history, it is also the primary tool of art⁴. And when considering relevant contributions to this debate, among them we could also mention Philippe Dubois' observations on image-trace and image-fiction, which draws upon theories from the last 40 years related to the photographic and post-photographic. Old divisions become less distinguishable in the era of permanent change of speed, to the point that photography and cinema no longer constitute "good theoretical categories, to think the matter of time (and of movement)"⁵, Dubois argues. Furthermore, he also inquires into present day aspects such as the document as archive, the stock and flow of private/public pictures, the spatiotemporal unity of the image (a matter that can be also applied to film) and the immobility of the image when considering "the temporal elasticity of contemporary images"⁶.

This framework has set the base for the international call for papers to this volume of *Archivo Papers Journal*, which aims to address the contradictions and challenges of present time(s) from the perspectives of authors and artists who are currently researching the subject. How do we look back to face ahead? How are artists shaping time by creating the artworks of (and for) the future? And if the photographic image closely relates to our multidimensional reality, how is photography's timely and untimely nature contributing to the construction of the contemporary?

The first issue of this volume, titled "Intersecting memories and activating temporalities", presents some strands of the selected proposals and reflections.

Ernst Van Alphen, professor emeritus of Literary Studies at the Leiden University and renowned scholar with in-depth work on the articulations of time with photography, image, archive, memory, perception and modernity, opens the edition with an interview in which he discusses current conceptual debates, as well as some of the key topics also present in the essays that follow.

Chrononormativity and the rhythms of temporal experience are addressed by Marta Labad in "'Time matters". Reflections on time, photography, and labour." By drawing from the work of artists that combine sculpture and photography, the author explores the possibilities for escaping productivity syndrome and to resist rooted temporalities. While departing from a different angle, resistance and the coexistence of different temporalities also structures the essay *Sky Hopinka and Entangled Indigenous Identities on the triangular relationship between photography, time and colonialism*, by Esther Scholtes, who questions aesthetics and forms of control that photographically mediate ideas of Indigeneity.

In "Time, Memory, and Traumatic Histories: Where Birds Never Sing but Images Do", Santasil Mallik examines the relationship between photography and trauma after the caesura of time caused by the 1979 Marichjhapi Massacre of refugees in West Bengal, India – a state atrocity that photographer Soumya Sankar Bose attempted to render visible in a 2020 book that combined fragments of oral testimonies, found documents and personal dreamscapes to build a counter-archive seeped in phantasmagoria. The reconfiguration of mnemonic, semiotic and

visual tensions is also interwoven within the essay "Liminal Intervals: For All Dead/ Alive Time", by Karlie Weltman. Here the author focusses on the heterotopias and attendant heterochronic openings present in the static images and film installations of Agnès Varda, as zones of exchange between photography and cinema.

The visual essay by Daniel Barroca reveals unpublished material captured in Guinea-Bissau, where the artist is conducting his PhD research in Anthropology and filming "Fire in the Mud" (to be released in 2023), a co-authored work with Catarina Laranjeiro on the divisions of a border community during and after the Portuguese Colonial War (1963-1974). Considering it as a "detour from a larger project", in this essay Barroca explores the ways in which the human body perceives natural elements, materialities and cultural interactions to address destabilising experiences and to question how images may become traps.

Closing this first issue, the work of Chloe Dewe Mathews, "Shot at Dawn" (2014) presents a reexamination of World War I through an individual dimension usually omitted from historical narratives. Resulting from her systematic research on courts-martial documents, old aerial photographs and other information sources, this series discloses the sites at which British, French and Belgian troops were shot dead for disobeying orders or deserting, between 1914 and 1918. By photographing the places where those men were held or executed by firing squads, the artist reintroduces other traumatic dimensions to intersecting temporalities.

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- 1 Smith 2019
 - 2 Idem
 - 3 Bal 2018
 - 4 Idem, 100-101
 - 5 Dubois 2016, 166
 - 6 Idem, 164-165