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## Being with Time, reviewing *TIME (Documents of Contemporary Art)*

Megan Garrett-Jones

It might seem strange to review a book in which texts have been collected around the theme of time for inclusion in a journal issue on the theme of solidarity. Still, the pervasiveness of questions of temporality in current thinking and creative practice, as exemplified in the book *TIME (Documents of Contemporary Art)*,<sup>1</sup> begs consideration of how implications of these issues spill into other concerns. Under consideration in this review is rethinking solidarity by rethinking time. 'Time' is a long established theoretical base camp for the performance studies discipline. My reading of this book is impacted by an attempt to explore potentialities of solidarity and/in performance by drawing out a notion of solidarity that considers time. Attention is given to the textual enactment of *being with* and meetings of commonality amongst the contributions in *TIME*.

First, I wish to address what the evocation of 'solidarity' means in regards to the key discursive underpinnings of *TIME*, which could be described as the proposal to wrest time from the modern narrative of linear progress and the objectivist perspective of traditional Western metaphysics. The desire for objectivity that holds time as a measurable and unidirectional element is of the same outlook that demands absolutes and truths verifiable with reference to an external nonhuman reality (Rorty 1991, p.21). Rorty suggests a conception of solidarity in contrast with objectivity, following the (largely poststructuralist) thesis that meaning is formed in relations amongst people (1991). The perception of time as progress in line with goals for a common humanity is one absolute that is undone with the awareness that the flow of time sees only the multiplication of difference. Solidarity emerges as dialogue between multiple understandings, and a continual process of (re)forging common modes of knowledge. For Rorty, this is the way that meaning forms in relation to a

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<sup>1</sup> Groom, Amelia (ed.), *TIME (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press.

community, though we may go further with Jean Luc Nancy to say that *being* becomes meaning precisely in the condition of *being with* (2000). Solidarity then, in this text, is understood as this condition of *being present with* that considers different temporal understandings of this *being with*.

The question of what it is to be contemporary that concerns many of the texts in *TIME* may be refigured as a question of what it means *to be with* (an artwork, another person, a text), and as a question therefore of solidarity. In one of the weightier critical inclusions in the collection, Giorgio Agamben explores the figure of 'the contemporary' as one perceiving the present who is not subsumed by the here and now. From the perspective of the critic, he asks, how can we be contemporaries of texts we access from the (distant or near) past? Agamben draws a lesson from one epitome of contemporariness – fashion, in its ability to 'recall, re-evoke and revitalise that which it has declared dead' (2009, p.87). This ability for citation is linked with untimeliness, a Nietzschean notion that reappears throughout the book, referring to the archaic out-of-time. Untimeliness is to see the past, and perhaps the future, as always *within* the present. 'Our age' is thus fractured; its darkness is time not lived. 'The contemporary' shines light on this darkness by making 'of this fracture a meeting place, or an encounter between times and generations' (Agamben 2009, p.88). Here it is suggested that *to be in the presence of* is not necessarily *to be present with*, and the possibility for trans-temporal discursive communities is cleaved open.

The survey of artists in *TIME* via commentary and artists' texts further asks what is a contemporary artist, examines the time of being with an artwork, and how art may act as a trans-temporal discursive nexus. In Quinn Latimer's contribution, it is inbuilt anachronism that makes painter Sylvia Sleigh truly contemporary. Her realist style that documented the bohemian/domestic lives of her husband and inner circle was at odds with the context of their production: 1970s New York at the height of abstract painting and radical second-wave feminism. A sore thumb in the 1970's, her work now creates a bridge for viewers to that time, but also to the realist figurative traditions it drew upon, a 'doubling' created through its 'handling and dismantling of time's autonomy and progression' (Latimer 2013, p.92). Other examples are

presented of artists bridging temporal divides, such as the home-movie mash-ups of artist duo nova-Milne. A common thread is found in the challenging or 'dismantling' of rigid chronologies to place temporally disparate elements in dialogue.

Works of the artist (or critic) can forge meetings across times. In the introduction to *TIME*, editor Amelia Groom warns that to access them 'simply as pedagogical historical documents is to suffocate them' (2013, p.15). If solidarity is a meeting – a *being with* – then it must also be an activation. In *TIME*, George Didi-Huberman (2000, p.34) recounts the experience of standing before a 1440's Italian fresco and having a 'blaze of colour' recall for him the action paintings of Jackson Pollock. While inadequate for a historical analysis, this 'involuntary memory', in the spirit of Proust or Benjamin, showed, not that the fresco was a precursor to action painting, but that 'before an image [...], the present never ceases to reshape' (Didi-Huberman 2000, p.35). Viewing an artwork is an action of complex multi-temporality, and it is the effort and the perspective of the beholder that imagines a communion of meaning across time. *TIME* attests to the many artists and curators making this process explicit through attention to the archive and re-presentation of history.

Of course it is not only the relation between art and history under revision in *TIME*. The book is structured into successive sections of *before*, *during* and *after*, and this decision seems ironically framed by its iterations rejecting the dominance of linearity and progression. The texts, thus organised, work to define as much as to challenge these categories.

In *during*, Boris Groys succinctly iterates the feeling that gives rise to our contemporary fixation with time, which may well shape out notions of solidarity. It is proposed that contemporary anxieties about time are born from the dissolution of the Modernist project, particularly the accumulation of our time and work towards utopic futures. In this dissolution, the present time can be viewed as a pause, a reconsideration, and even a crisis of what we are *doing* with our time. As Groys states, 'under the conditions of our contemporary product-orientated civilisation, time does indeed have problems when it is perceived as being unproductive, wasted, meaningless' (2009, p.154). So-called 'time-based' art draws on wasted time, excess

time, repetitive time, and even creates 'art-based time' to attest 'to our life as pure being-in-time' (Groys 2009, p.153). The old catch cry of performance as pure presence is rehashed here. We are to become 'comrades of time' and to consider the contemporary as 'being with time' – a state in which notions of past and futurity are stripped back to a *being with* in the presence of repetition and perpetual reinvention. Again, the dissolution of Modernist myths of progress affects a rethinking of solidarity. If we are no longer joined in a common goal for humanity, perhaps Groys's 'art-based time' finds an equivalence in a pure *being with* others, attending simply to the presence of others.

The idea of pure presence is ever problematic. Revealing is that Nato Thompson's contribution delivers little more than a description of Marina Abramović's mystique and celebrity. In Abramović's *The Artist is Present*, the event of being with the artist is supposed to provide a communion, and yet the short excerpt, 'Contractions of Time: On Social practice from a Temporal Perspective', never gets to the promising subject implied in its title. Later, Nancy Spector's review of *Il Tempo Postra*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Phillipe Parreno, describes a show in which the audience are *with* performance works staged in a proscenium arch theatre for a set duration as an experiment in 'still-unexplored territory' for the visual arts (2007, p.130). The difference between this show and theatre is that it was billed as a durational exhibition. Performance studies might however suggest such disciplinary distinctions are unhelpful, as the inclusion of artists from a variety of disciplinary leanings using an incredible breadth of temporal properties throughout *TIME* would confirm. Triteness from a few of the magazine-style inclusions is one of my few criticisms of this book. Funnily, as they are discussing the more recent projects, they may just be there to give the book a 'so contemporary' edge. Often giving a mere taste, the format of this book can work as a prompt for further enquiry, an occasional touchstone, or food-for-thought for those of us who rush around our busy lives.

A collection of writings on time would feel lacking without Henri Bergson – an early critic of the dominance of a homogenous, unidirectional approach to time. His brief excerpt pertains to time's indivisibility. Time as duration is in fact movement and division; even infinitely small points on a trajectory form an incomplete

representation. This short text is a mere flash-in-the-pan of Bergson's ideas, although provides for an also brief Bergsonian follow-on from Gilles Deleuze on the qualitative difference in both time and space. As a compilation, one could easily jump around the artificial linearity of *TIME*. However, reading the texts successively is rewarding, as key references and points are picked up from one text to the next. The editor's hand can be felt in placing these voices in direct dialogue, making overt the very process of 'making contemporary' as described by Agamben.

What makes artists who deal specifically with duration continually accessible is the way that their temporal attentiveness produces documents. Tehching Hsieh's extensive mapping of his trajectories through New York City during his year spent outside (never entering a building of any kind), made it possible for critic Adrian Heathfield to retrace the artist's steps for his book, *Out of Now: Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (Heathfield 2008). What makes On Kawara's date paintings an effective prompt to consider our relation to the recording and measurement of time is their hanging on a wall, stubbornly announcing a date already past, a moment frozen to be pushed forward into the future. For Jean Luc Nancy reflecting on On Kawara in *TIME*, poesis (artistic production) is itself a 'putting forward' within the temporal passage – it is to encounter the already past (1997, p.110).

'Art-based time' may refer more simply to an understanding of time that is experiential, involving a 'tactile attentiveness' and 'the collapse of objective measure', as Adrian Heathfield notes (2009, p.97). It is the marking of our experience of time that allows it to be communicated to others and accounts for the multiplicity of human experience. In a way, *TIME* performs this exchange – making connections and facilitating circulation around particular notions of time. We might return to Rorty for the suggestion that solidarity emerges from common allegiances to the perception of 'what it is *good* for us to believe' (1991, p.8). With the particular slant of this book, rethinking temporality can be equated with rethinking a standpoint of solidarity: of *being in time together* – both a receptive opening up to the present and the forging of networks across time.

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**Amelia Groom (ed.), *Time***

Peter Peters

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# Time and the contemporary in art

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Amelia Groom (ed.), *Time*. Whitechapel Gallery/Cambridge: London, The MIT Press: MA, 2013, 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-85488-215-1 (Whitechapel Gallery)/978-0-262-51966-3 (The MIT Press)

In 1980–1981, the New York City-based performance artist Tehching Hsieh punched a clock, every hour, on the hour for a whole year. He documented his performance by taking hourly pictures of himself. *Time Clock Piece* was the second of five One-Year Performances that Hsieh completed between 1978 and 2000. In her brief essay *When Time Becomes Form* (2009), Marina Abramovic ranks the performance among the most demanding pieces that Hsieh made. ‘You can’t go further than one hour from the location, you can’t sleep more than an hour. There is an incredible restrained geometry around this piece, and a discipline, which is just phenomenal to me’ (p. 94). Commenting on Abramovic’s work and her own durational performance *The Artist is Present* in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2010, writer, activist and curator Nato Thompson claims that the ‘dematerialized, agitated nature of the current era’ explains the recent popularity of artists who embrace ‘all things slow, endless and tedious’ (p. 93).

It is through the work of artists such as Hsieh and Abramovic that we acquire new understandings of time, however difficult it may be to express these understandings in words. *Time* is the deceptively simple title of an anthology of texts on the concept of time in the arts, more specifically the visual and performance arts. It covers the many ways in which artists have explored temporalities and questioned sequential and linear temporal orderings and chronological perspectives. The book is part of the Documents of Contemporary Art Series co-published by Whitechapel Gallery in London and The MIT Press in Cambridge, MA. Other edited volumes in this series have focused on concepts such as Colour, Nature, Ruins, Sound and The Sublime. Edited by London-based critic and curator Amelia Groom, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on time in art, *Time* presents a selection of texts written by artists, curators, critics, art historians, philosophers, theorists and writers. Contemporary artists whose work is surveyed include

Francis Alÿs, Olafur Eliasson, Janet Cardiff, Katie Paterson and Sylvia Sleigh, and there are texts from writers such as Henri Bergson, Jorge Luis Borges, Gilles Deleuze, Bruno Latour and Doreen Massey. Most of the texts are short excerpts, sometimes no longer than a page.

Amelia Groom starts her introduction to the collection with the observation that the concept of time cannot be defined precisely. Instead of trying to give definitions, art has the potential to ask new questions about time:

Wasting and waiting, regression and repetition; non-consumation and counterproductivity; the belated and the obsolete; the disjointed and the out of synch – these are all familiar tropes in the work of contemporary artists, and point to a widespread questioning of the idea of time as an arrow propelling us in unison from the past into the future. (p. 12)

Even though the distinction of past, present and future might be illusory to some of the artists in the book, Groom loosely structured it in three sections titled *Before*, *During* and *After*. In the first section, questions concerning the non-linear character of art history are dealt with. Instead of a single canon of works and styles that can be traced back to shared origins, the history of art shows ‘symbiotic relations between artworks from dramatically disparate times’ (p. 15). The section called *During* presents artists and writers who have worked with notions such as the ‘Contemporary’ and what Benjamin has called *Jetztzeit*, or ‘now time’, a way to destabilize teleological time and the implicit causality embedded in the continuum of history. The last section *After* deals with issues of futurity and change.

At first sight, *Time* gives the impression of being a rather rhapsodic collection. Most of the texts are written in the past decade, but some are older, with Augustine’s *Time and Eternity* as the extreme. The book can be read in many ways, from beginning to end or vice versa, or by just picking random texts. It is only after one starts reading, that the seemingly random juxtaposition of texts and topics reveals a subtle ordering. Every text follows up on aspects of the previous one, and already precludes hints at what will follow. The reader is invited to create his or her own trajectories in the book. One such trajectory renders insights in synchronicity and simultaneity, or even the ‘folding’ of times. In her reflections in response to Olafur Eliasson’s 2003 installation *The Weather Project* in the Tate Modern in London, geographer Doreen Massey describes a train journey where moving through time means transecting millions of local and ongoing stories. In his art, she argues, Eliasson challenges ‘the static, given, implacable “objecthood” of art’ (p. 117) and in doing so shows how ‘space has time/times within in’. Space cannot be revisited. Like the Heraclitan river it will have changed, in the same way the train station you left a few moments ago

has already changed. This reflection on simultaneity across times is taken up in the next text in which Timothy Barker refers to Michel Serres's idea of a car as an aggregate of problems and solutions from other times, a 'multi-temporal assemblage, taking form in the present' (p. 123). Barker recounts how the Canadian sound artist Janet Cardiff plays with this notion of multi-temporality in *Her Long Black Hair* (2004), a project in which participants wearing headphones walk a directed route through New York's Central Park, and listen to the sounds of past moments at these same places. The reader who continues to read the texts in their printed order will remember Serres's car when getting to his conversation with Bruno Latour in which he explains his 'folded' topographies of time. Serres: 'An object, a circumstance, is thus polychronic, multitemporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats' (p. 164).

A second example of a reading trajectory could be the notion of the contemporary. Here, we could start with the text by Dexter Sinister, the working name of New York-based designers, publishers and writers Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt. They vividly describe the 'Ponzi scheme' in which computer networks communicate and coordinate the correct time, using the time-sharing conventions of the Network Time Protocol (NTP). The origin of this protocol is the Caesium Atomic Fountain Clock at the NIST laboratories in Colorado. By technologically enabling the communication of the 'now', NIST could be said to define the contemporary in a practical sense. Art critic Boris Groys points out a different and more political meaning of 'contemporary'. According to him, it does not necessarily mean to be in the here-and-now, rather it means to be 'with time' instead of 'in time'. To be contemporary, Groys argues, is to be a 'comrade of time', to help time when it has problems. 'And under conditions of our contemporary product-oriented civilization, time does indeed have problems when it is perceived as being unproductive, wasted, meaningless' (p. 154). To be a comrade of this unproductive time is what time-based art can do, Groys claims – as art-based time.

It is clear from these exemplary trajectories that *Time* does not provide understandings of time along the lines of disciplinary conventions. It is also not a book that gives a systematic overview of the use and relevance of the concept of time in the contemporary art, or even of the relations between art, historicity and the temporal. Yet, the book is certainly of value for scholars of time in society. When it comes to the relation between art and science, we are often trapped in dualisms: words and worlds, art practice and art writing, discursive and embodied knowledge, original art works and their representations. We often find ourselves rehearsing clichéd notions of what characterizes art as well as science. Art becomes a paragon of unmethodological, autonomous and intuitive work, while science appears

uncreative, methodological and articulate. One can read *Time* as an attempt to transcend these dichotomies. It creates space for a notion of arts-based research as a productive middle ground. It does so by opening up a plurality of times. Even in the one-year long performance of Hsieh, we can distinguish between measured clock time, the timing of repetitive action, the disciplining of these actions through time, the experience of the passing of time, time as minute change that can be traced on the hourly photographs, and more. Merging form and content, the main quality of the book is that it encourages the reader to travel along with these times, taking unexpected routes, asking new questions.

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Art & artists

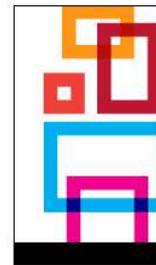
## Investigating illusory distinctions of past, present and future

— January 2014



Article —  
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Art & artists

# Investigating illusory distinctions of past, present and future

— January 2014

There is no shortage of engaging material in this this fascinating and stimulating compilation, says Howard Hollands

Time: Documents of Contemporary Art, edited by Amelia Groom

The target audience for the extensive series of titles that make up the 'Documents of Contemporary Art' is the 'interested reader', but particularly from the fields of the criticism, history, teaching or arts practice. The series

sets out to provide a diverse and provocative range of approaches to a particular issue and this latest, titled *Time*, is no exception and the contributions come from areas in both fiction and non-fiction.

*Time* has three sections according to the 'illusory distinctions of past, present and future' and renamed as; 'Before', 'During' and 'After'. Inevitably, with a title as slippery as 'Time', categorizations become stretched, but as an organizational device it works well in this volume.

Given the theme of 'Time' and the implications for what is meant by 'contemporary', and being read now, in the illusory present, it is perhaps surprising that there are not more pre-20th-century contributions as, these are, arguably, equally contemporary, but there is no shortage of engaging material.

The editor's level of research is broad and deep as shown through her introduction that draws upon her doctoral dissertation on the same topic. The collection of texts ranges from George Kubler's 'The Shape of Time', which challenged linear narratives of history, to analyses of Christian Marclay's astonishingly skilful looped 24-hour video, *The Clock* (2010), a collage made from thousands of fragments of found footage from the history of film cinema with each fragment depicting a visual image of time. This film, about time, is a clock in its own right as it is viewed in real time synchronized to the actual time of the place where it is viewed. The anxiety generated when viewing the film is captured well by writer Lynne Tillman:

*It was Thursday – 3.15pm, 3.16pm, 3.17pm – I was watching time pass. My time. It was passing, and I was watching it. What is this watching, what am I watching for? I wouldn't, couldn't wait for the end.*

It's worth noting that there are no images in this book, and from the few others I have read in the series, this seems to be a conscious editorial decision. One can understand the reasoning here, given the power of images in relation to the text, but this might be frustrating for some readers given the wonderful possibilities with this theme. Nonetheless, the comparatively short and pithy length of the contributions, the layout, and the well-chosen typeface makes for easy access to the ideas. As a book that encourages re-reading and reference it is produced in a robust soft-back form with a double folding cover – this makes for comfortable reading.

On the opening page we are presented with a quotation from Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, which might as easily be located on the final page of this fascinating and stimulating compilation:

*We look at the present through a rear-view mirror.*

*We march backwards into the future*

As I read this new addition to the series I am conscious of the way it links, possibly unknowingly, to contributions in earlier titles I have read, for example, *Memory, Ruins or Failure*. In this way, the series simply gets richer and richer as a collection and library and as a valuable resource. This is a great collection that must certainly pass the test of time.

*Time: Documents of Contemporary Art, edited by Amelia Groom, is published by Whitechapel Gallery with MIT Press. 237 pp., unillustrated, ppb. ISBN: 978-0-85488-215-1*

## Credits

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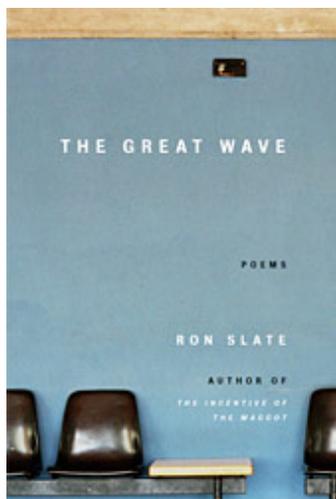
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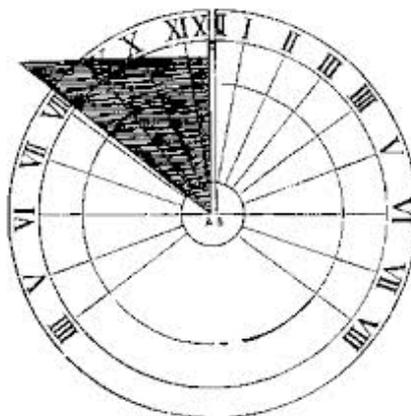
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**on Time, edited by Amelia Groom (MIT Press)**

January 3rd, 2014

In my early teens I took drum lessons after school from a local jazz and standards band leader. I would go to his house where he set up two kits in his drafty basement. Affably half-drunk by four o'clock, he would say, "We don't keep time, son, we make time." Keeping time was for bass players whom he also accused of poor hygiene. The drummer controls tempo, emphases and punctuation. He has a proprietary attitude about time.

Soon I discovered that poets often insist on having the first and last word about conceiving time. The purpose of meter is not to keep time but to take full responsibility for making time. Osip Mandelstam wrote, "For Dante, time is the content of history felt as a single synchronic act, and inversely, the purpose of history is to keep time together so that all are brothers and companions in the same quest and conquest of time." But time and history are up for grabs; poets have faced competition – and sometimes lethal resistance -- from the most entrenched centers of power.



In his 2007 book *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History*, Denis Feeney observes, "If you were a Greek or Roman moving between ambits of two or more states, it was impossible to have any kind of time frame in your head at all if you could not handily correlate disparate people and events." Each city promulgated its own calendar. How could you run an empire without clocks to synchronize time? Julius Caesar took the initiative by revamping the

Republican calendar, establishing commemorations, festivals and anniversaries to be observed throughout the territories.

In what we now call the fifth century A.D., Dionysius Exiguus dreamed up the exact moment of Jesus' birth while trying to fix an appropriate date to celebrate Easter. History began to accumulate and press forward. Synchronization of time standards became necessary with the increase of speed in connecting places by coach, but also to organize mass labor. By 1500, clocks in the city square were tolling on the quarter hour.

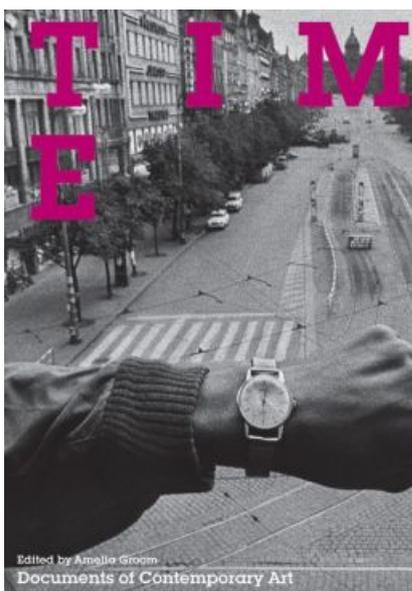
But the artist believes that people inhabit different frames of time, often simultaneously – cyclical or recurrent, linear, seasonal, social, historical, private. Eugenio Montale spells it out in his poem "Time and Times" in this translation by William Arrowsmith:

*There's no unique time, rather many tapes*

running parallel,  
often contradictory, and rarely  
intersecting. But then the sole truth  
is disclosed and, once disclosed, immediately  
erased by whoever runs the recorder  
and spins the dials. And then we fall back  
into unique time. But in that instant  
only the few people still alive  
have recognized each other in time to say,  
not be-seeing-you, but good-bye.



For the art critic and curator Amelia Groom, “the contemporary” is the adversary of the artist. In her essay “Sisyphus,” she writes, “This is the paradox of the Modernist notion of ‘progress’: with the indefinite postponement of closure, it demands that we strive for it but never reach it ... Because there is always more to acquire, the arrow of time loops back on itself. The treadmill makes us *run in place*, so step-by-step becomes step-on-top-of-step.”



Groom’s animus toward capitalism provides the impetus for *Time*, a wonderfully varied collection of 57 essential essays. But time is the preoccupation and province of every serious artist in every genre, whether or not one creates work with overt subversive intentions. A reading of *Time* is bound to be richly rewarding through its articulation and qualification of time-ish notions that hover over our work. It is an invaluable sourcebook, selected for foundational thinking and edited for impact. Although the selection is biased toward statements of the past few decades, there are older texts by Augustine, Dogen Zenji, and Bergson.

Rooted in art and design, *Time* is deeply literary and philosophical in its references. There are pieces by Borges and Calvino, Deleuze and Agamben, Filipovic and Abramovic.

Groom works to discredit “the notion of artistic production as a conscious, heroic, step-by-step execution from an idea to a predetermined end,” asking us to consider time from the perspective of the artwork itself. There is a latency of moments in writing and art, “a thickening of the present to acknowledge its multiple, interwoven temporalities.” Quoting Giorgio Agamben, Groom says “the ‘true contemporary’ is someone who can perceive the obscurity of the present ... To disrupt the notion of a homogenous, uni-directional time made from a string of separate instants is to undermine the hubris of the present.”

A sampling of *Time*:

George Kubler, 1962: “Time, like mind, is not knowable as such. We know time

only indirectly by what happens in it, by observing change and permanence, by marking the succession of events among stable settings, and by noting the contract of varying rates of change.”

Jean-Luc Nancy, 1997: “Not history as a grandiose or confused movement of the destiny of peoples, nor as the monumental heaping together of culture and barbarity, nor as an adventure of events, but history as the simultaneous presence of its millions of histories, present history, presentified history.”

Elizabeth Grosz, 1999: “Time tends to function as a silent accompaniment, a shadowy implication underlying, contextualizing and eventually undoing all knowledges and practices without being their explicit object of analysis or speculation.”

Boris Groys, 2009: “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<sup>3</sup> – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control.”

Adrian Heathfield, 2009: “... to times that will not submit to Western culture’s linear, progressive meta-narratives, its orders of commodification; to the times of excluded or marginalized identities and lives; to times as they are felt in diverse bodies. Time, then, as plenitude: heterogeneous, informal and multi-faceted.”

Giorgio Agamben, 2009: “The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live. The attention to this ‘unlived’ life is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.”



Not only does time not “pass” in the same way for everyone, but the difference suggests that time does not pass at all. Nevertheless, if you want to make a souffle, you have to watch the clock. The poets know this, of course, and it is why many poems about time are tragic even as time is reclaimed by the poet in the measures of the poem. Think of Emily Dickinson’s ferocious poem “A Clock stopped,” usually read as an extended metaphor for death, but even more provocative when taken as a

disempowerment of conventional time and its reincorporation as the poem’s testy duration:

*A Clock stopped –  
Not the Mantel’s –  
Geneva’s farthest skill  
Can’t put the puppet bowing –  
That just now dangled still –*

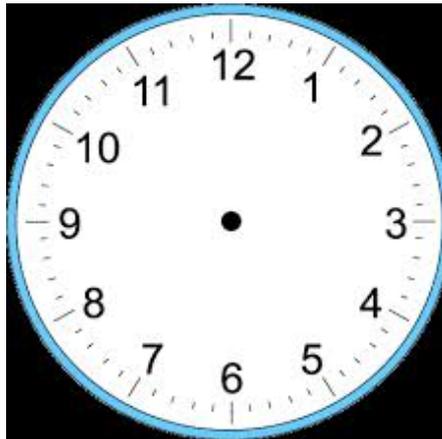
*An awe came on the Trinket!  
The Figures hunched, with pain –  
Then quivered out of Decimals –  
Into Degreeless Noon –*

*It will not stir for Doctors –  
This Pendulum of snow –  
This Shopman importunes it –  
While cool – concernless No –*

*Nods from the Gilded pointers –  
Nods from the Seconds slim –  
Decades of Arrogance between  
The Dial life –  
And Him --*

For the poets, dropping out of time is often serious business even when it is liberating. In “Come, Break With Time,” Louise Bogan asks, “You who were lorded / By a clock’s chime” to reject the conventional hours. But in the fourth and final stanza, she leaches out any remaining rising spirit:

*Take the rocks’ speed  
And earth’s heavy measure.  
Let buried seed  
Drain out time’s pleasure,  
Take time’s decrees.  
Come, cruel ease.*



Amelia Groom tells us that “art can show us how our understanding of time has always been something fabricated and shifting rather than pre-existing or ‘natural.’” Walter Benjamin devised the term *Jetztzeit* or “now time” and “called on us to stop ‘telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary’ and instead grasp ‘the constellation’ which the present forms with the past.” All art has been/is contemporary.

Playing Julius O’Hara in John Huston’s 1954 film *Beat the Devil*, Peter Lorre put it this way: “

“Time. Time. What is time? Swiss manufacture it. French hoard it. Italians want it. Americans say it is money. Hindus say it does not exist. Do you know what I say? I say time is a crook.”

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### Re Time

On January 4th, 2014 Rob Schackne says:

Time obviates

what time cannot tell  
at 12 noon  
I am 2 days before  
at dinner  
wondering if  
she'll stay the night

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