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Time, a Glossary

**MFA**  
Kunstakademiet 2018

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# Time, a Glossary

MA essay, Kunstakademiet i Oslo

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# Introduction

The Russian word 'krai' [край] can be used for both a territory and an edge. This makes an interesting case since the same word could be applied in a territorial context from different angles. Moving along the edge calls for a sense of borders. Being inside the territory implies being surrounded or submerged. Shifting between being outside and inside, in-between and confronted, infers to a certain kind of dynamics.

It then can extend to, say, a vision, or a narrative, or any other form of language. I am looking for this dynamics in the works of others and in my own. I have chosen a glossary form for this essay as it gives a sense of the outlines I want to mark for myself in relation to the subjects of time, image and text.

# Duration of an image

*Let the mouse run over the stone. Count only its every step.*

*Only forget the word every, only forget the word step.*

— Alexander Vvedensky

## ***Time as an experience***

Sometimes, the sense of continuity may transform, turning viscous or pulsated, red or silver, high-pitched or submerged. Such an experience could originate from something as ordinary as an encounter on a way to the bus stop, triggered by a peculiar set of atmospheric conditions — that of smell, weather, light and other details of the environment. In cinema, similar moments could saturate, shifting between the perceptions of different characters to an inanimate observer, like the long vertical sequence in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Such gaze could be a way to read an image as an image, lifting the weight of the metaphor often imposed on top.

## ***Duration***

*“Let's think about simple things. A person says: tomorrow, today, evening, Thursday, a month, a year, during a week. We count hours in a day. We consider that they accumulate. [...] But time adds differently from any other forms of accumulation. It's impossible to compare three lived months with three grown trees. The trees are present, twinkling dimly with their leaves. We can't say anything like that with the confidence about the months.”* As in this text by a poet Alexander Vvedensky, where time is shown to be its own substance, independent of measurements and words, Henry Bergson developed a concept of *duration* — the notion of which spans from psychological continuity to the observable duration of other things, animate or inanimate.

### ***Rhythms***

It is intuitive to think a big city and a forest to have different rhythms. For smaller places, the notion of their rhythms seems to be less intuitive as their cycles of change are not as obvious. Yet, some places do have their own rhythms — think of a construction site or an abandoned building. Music and poetry often feel like a place.

### ***Metabolism***

Consider a dandelion. It could be nice to observe. However, glancing at it for mere moments is closer to looking at it as a still (*schematic*). If you were to watch it for hours straight, what you would be looking at is its process of being — its metabolism. The innate duration of things and beings is expressed through their unique states of consistency and change. It is necessarily to slow yourself down so a duration of a thing could present itself. The duration cannot be reduced to the object's individually analyzed states, and neither is it an imaginative reflection. In Bergsonian spirit, duration of an object is its *difference in kind*, noticed when one looks between the subjective and analytic lenses. Acknowledging duration as a real metaphysical property of things gives them a whole separate way of being considered.

### ***Schematic***

As opposed to looking at, say, a cup, and basically just seeing where the handle is.

### ***Projected time***

Time of a memory is the most elusive notion of time. Since it's not being lived as you recall it, it involves placing oneself in the context of it, an approximation. Closely related is the perception of time when looking at a text or an image. For instance, how long does Ulysses actually last?

### *Duration of an image*

Any painting exists both as a physical object and as an image (at least when somebody's looking at it). Bergson described an image as something in between the object and the idea. In the case of a painting, the immediate response becomes an image overlaid on top of the physical surface of the painting, much like a second exposure. Hence, the duration of a painting is a combination of the overlaid image and the painting itself, which makes its properties arguably subjective, yet potentially present in the painting.

Take Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* as an example. In the painting there are two mirrors that extend both the space of the scene and its time. The space is extended by showing the otherwise invisible part of the room. Time is extended through the gaze of the infante and the artist as they look at the mirror, while whoever is standing in before the painting, basically, is the mirror. This second mirror is making a time loop between the observers standing in front of the depicted scene, and the observers depicted in the scene.

# Time Scores

## ***Brushstroke***

Shih-t'ao described the movement of a brush as something of the same nature as movement of elements, such as air and water. A gesture becomes an impression which becomes a letter, a stain, an image. A poet wrote that letters written in ink don't exist as letters, because a letter is a form in which meanings reside due to conventionalities. At the same time, ink is a tangible thing, it exists, and one should contemplate the reality of ink in all letters in order to understand that meanings reside in the shapes it takes.

In Russian, the word for 'stain' [пятно] could be used to mean 'patch', which makes it possible to compare a stain of ink to a patch of sunlight. To put this a step further, one could think of analog photography, where light creates a lasting image through direct contact and chemical reaction, much like ink does. If a brushstroke is akin to the movement of elements, then a word could be akin to the movement of the body.

## ***Attention***

Photography and cinematography are probably the two media that vividly demonstrate the work of attention. Since cropping resembles the process of seeing, it demonstrates how the frame of attention constructs the models of the world. And then, attention itself comes in varieties that work like camera filters, influencing the image by limiting a part of the spectrum — the biological attention, the emotional attention, the visual attention, the auditory attention, et cetera.

## ***Intuition***

The Deleuze's analysis of Bergson's concept of intuition is introduced as *neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method.*

It raises the question — as far as art is concerned, what kind of observation, which leans towards the description of both the experience and the conditions of experience, is possible, when one follows the *intuition* as their primary method.

### ***Grapheme***

Grapheme is the smallest unit of a writing system. It's used primarily in linguistics, but could be extended to any semiotic system with a visual element at its base. In time scores, a grapheme is a singular brushstroke, and a smallest unit of description.

### ***Time scores***

The term itself — time scores — implies that time could be approached semiotically, if given a flexible enough system of signifiers and graphemes, similar to how music uses notation to be distributed and preserved. In this, I don't mean an alternative to a common measurement system, e.g. a clock, but rather a system that could work with the notions of time described in the sections on metabolism and duration. A mere act of attention enables us to pick out a number of perceptual elements that follow along the passage of time, like the presence of light or sound. This gives us a way of comparison and gradation, unhierarchical and thus without any attempt to harmonize the results. In other words, time scores are the recordings of documented attention to things and beings in the context of passing time.

# Tangent, Trace, Imperfect Contact

*[...] Painfully impossible to remember some phrase*

*Unpleasant sense from the fact that the mind is not capable to 'grasp'*

*the border between the absorption and the knowledge of it. Erfassen.[...]*

— Arkadii Dragomoshchenko

## ***Observation***

Observation is not something simply visual or auditory, but a set of activities. It may be parallel to what Pauline Oliveros was doing with *deep listening*, or how Lyn Hejinian once said, in the context of writing poetry, that she begins with radical observation similar to what she finds present in *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein. It's informative, but not necessarily information-based. Much of it is like looking at a map of a foreign landscape: it has the specifics that can tell you something about the landscape, you don't immediately know, which of them are "important". Which parts you can work with. In this sense, observation is pre-descripton. It needs to be open in terms of methods.

I'm trying to conduct an observation of things as they relate to time.

## ***Lines***

Lines are the different threads of observation.

## ***Descriptions***

Generally, description follows perception. Sometimes, it shifts from one to another. The question is whether one could describe without conceptualizing, or if description is conceptualizing per se. Maybe, however, there is yet another way, in which description

serves as the means of direct contact, becoming-through-touch. That way, description becomes diffraction.

### ***Diffraction***

*[...] diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of [story-making about origins and truths]. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness. — Donna Haraway*

*[...] diffraction allows you to study both the nature of the apparatus and also the object. That is, both the nature of light and also the nature of the apparatus itself. — Karen Barad*

Diffraction came to me in a dream (seriously, it did) as a kind of a method of thinking. Take, for example, sensation. One may think of it as a ‘thing’, picked up from a shelf of sensations just like a thing is picked up from a shelf of things. If, however, sensation is seen as diffraction, then it’s more like a raindrop that sits on your window now, and tomorrow it’s in a cloud halfway to Cambodia.

### ***Trace***

It’s a curious a case when an object is absent while a trace is present. The trace is much like a footprint — it gives off a different feel from that which had left it. In the case of a footprint, the relation is more immediate — its shape is a place of direct influence on the environment. But then, a trace is not just something around the object, but also something that leads to it. Objects themselves could be traces to other objects. In other words, what makes a trace is the investigative interest in the environment and the information that it contains.

# An event of a fallen tree

## *An event of a fallen tree*

A fallen pine typically takes a few hundreds of years longer to decompose than a fallen spruce. A spruce could be gone within fifty. Disintegration is affected by the environmental conditions and the composition of the tree. The resins that used to protect the tree during its lifetime will keep preserving the wood, at least for a time. Decomposition may also faster in damp climates, but still, it takes ages. Even leaves take about three months. And while the falling of a tree has a noise and a hit and a breaking, that's an event of a tree that is falling. What's an event of a tree that has fallen? One might have to resort to describing the spaces around it.

## *Landscape*

Landscape is a word with many synonyms, each having distinct meanings and applications. For example, 'territory' can carry political meaning, 'land' is heavily linked with property ownership, while 'place' can be a sum of various features, some more personal than objective. So if the word and its synonyms carry such a wide multitude of directions, they give even a broader range of interpretations in media. Take two paintings from the same period, Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and *Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx* by Patinir. Both are idyllic in their sense, deeply focused on the depiction of nature, where each blade of grass requires a sharp treatment. Both take a mythological story as their core. And yet, Patinir shows a stable and linear world, where the fate of the soul is synonymous with the structure of the Creation, its passage a part of the natural order. Then again, small as it may be, it's still right there in the middle of things. Bruegel, on the other hand, shows the tragedy in a background, barely noticeable, but once noticed, it becomes the

centerpiece of attention, everything else happening in its context. Despite the indifference of it all, it now seems that even the sun could not be placed any differently.

### ***Land-forming***

Changing the landscape is a feature of settled life. Since the emergence of agriculture, traditional cultures commonly linked the idea of civilization with structure — worked land, irrigation and transportation systems, etc. Similarly, newly discovered lands would always get structured as a way of getting them into the fold — by building the outposts, finding the pathways or making maps. Personally, I am less interested in the historicity of these developments as much as the structural interplay that they have with the rest of the landscape.

### ***Complex event***

An event is hard to confine into a coordinate system of date and time. The interchanging of blacks and whites on both sides of a walking path could be reminiscent of those, as seen in a movie once — sharp and fuzzy, nearly monochrome sequence of semi-straight trunks passing by, a sense from which continuously emerges a rhythm of lights and shadows that is no longer a landscape but a sensation of nostalgic sadness of somebody else's life. On film, the event can resemble the subtleness of peripheral vision — depicting that interplay of fuzziness and clarity. But recorded events, unlike experienced, live like larvae until they are seen and developed by human mind into the world of immediate sensations. In this double exposure of lived and recorded, another territory is born — an event with the nomadic coordinates.

### ***Weeds, grasses***

Living in a suburbia of a city, I got interested in weeds growing along the way to the bus stop. At that time they were dried and partially covered with snow. Drawing and taking photos, I thought of it as portraiture of the plants whose names and lives I didn't really know. Encyclopedias don't really work well as the means of personal acquaintance. Botanical illustration, typically isolating the plant on a pure white background, takes it entirely out of context. By comparison, Hokusai's *Manga*, while in tune with the encyclopedic itemized

structure, shows them in the environment — going as far as to include the weather conditions. More than the gestures of simple naturalism, these details worked as the gestures of personalized attention.

*On the way to a bus stop*

Browsing through images of sounds. Ten minutes on the sidewalk — knapweed and white stucco. Do you remember the first time you tried to swim? A dust storm swirling up in a beam of light — I saw one like that set up in a museum dark room. How difficult would it be to divide a moment into the smallest parts? The particles might not have a consciousness, but they must have a memory. Sections and recognitions. The plants sense a presence through changing of lights and shadows. Building on from that.

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