

Book Chapter

The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass Artist Moving Image and Poetic Nonlinear Aspects of Time. In: Time and Measure Series: The Study of Time

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The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass: Artist Moving Image and Poetic Nonlinear Aspects of Time

Karen Heald

Abstract

In *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* the author, an interdisciplinary artist and academic whose practice embraces moving image explores poetic nonlinear aspects of time.

The research is set within the context of contemporary art, arts and science research, feminist action, and site-responsive approaches. Through a complex interdisciplinary methodology incorporating the performative use of time-based media while engaging with philosophical enquiry, visual analysis and experimental research, the exploration here draws upon Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Hito Steyerl's artworks and essay documentaries. The paper aims to articulate the phenomena of culture and the unmeasurability of temporal and spatiotemporal objects of sensory experience as distinguished from the clock.

Keywords

Interdisciplinary art practice – artist moving image – nonlinear narratives – experimental film – site-specific, visual analysis – in-between-ness – transitory strata – Julia Kristeva – Hito Steyerl – semiotic chora – spatiotemporal objects

1 Time and the Machine: Perceptions of the Clock

For many Western cultures the artificial construction of time is primarily measured through our perceptions of the clock. Clocks are a human construct designed to measure time, enabling us to retrieve information about the duration of events, and when and in what order they happen. Time therefore is significant within the context of the cosmos as well as in our own personal and social lives. However, attempting to decipher time's characteristics and

properties, artistically, philosophically or scientifically has led to unresolved issues and yet more questions.

As an interdisciplinary artist and academic whose practice embraces moving image, I created a new short film *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, described in this contextualizing essay, in order to explore poetic nonlinear aspects of time. My research is set within the context of contemporary art, arts and science research, feminist action, and site-responsive approaches. Through this complex interdisciplinary methodology I incorporate the performative use of time-based media while engaging with philosophical enquiry, visual analysis and experimental research. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's notions of the semiotic 'chora' and 'intertextuality', as well as Hito Steyerl's essay documentaries, I use concepts of 'in-between-ness', 'being-in-between' and 'transitory strata' to inform my own arts practice, I position myself as an artist thinking-with Kristeva through the medium of film, seeing poetic language as the embodiment of language's materiality. To a lesser extent I also work with Steyerl's ideas of verticality and the poor image. I discuss here the work of these theorists and contemporary artists alongside my dream films and other work as a means of exploring poetic nonlinear aspects of time. In this way, as in my artwork, I aim to articulate the phenomena of culture and the unmeasurability of temporal and spatiotemporal objects of sensory experience as distinguished from the clock.

2 Research Questions

As part of the process of preparing for my return to Japan after almost two decades, I reflected upon my imminent visit in the context of the time passed. This influenced my choice of footage for the film and conference paper, while a sense of displacement that I experienced on arrival in Japan enabled me to further reflect on my practice-based research. The result was the following research questions:

- How has temporality evolved in my practice, from early experiments to my newest film?
- How does my artwork perturb commonsense versus scientific notions of time?
- How do the tripartite ideas of in-between-ness, being in-between, and transitory strata, contribute to a new filmic landscape?
- How is this configuration new?

I aim to explore these questions by situating *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* within my work overall and in relation to these theoreticians.

Figure 14.1 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, moving image duration 10'06". Czech Republic, Tenerife, Wales

2.1 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*

The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass is an artist moving image¹ which I created specifically for the International Society for the Study of Time (ISST) Summer 2023 triennial conference which took place in Yamaguchi, Japan on the theme of *Time and Measure*. The artwork was initially envisioned as an installation² involving multiple screens and film segments projected onto a variety of significant objects, alongside a contextualizing performative paper. As artist Ilya Kabakov notes: “The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer.” However, due to equipment limitations, which affected all seven artists who participated in the exhibition and conference, the artwork was shown as a single channel film, on a timed loop with the other artists’ films. Follow the link below to view the film in its first iteration: *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* <https://vimeo.com/841515905>.

1 The genre of *Artist Moving Image* is situated between visual arts, and experimental film. For an expanded definition see “Defining Artists’ Moving Images” (2024).

2 The term installation art is used to describe large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time. For a more detailed discussion see “Art Term.”

Being restricted to the use of a single channel when exhibiting *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* enabled me to experiment with the flat 2D projection screen. The space in between, also known as the *Ma* in Japanese, refers to the gap or emptiness that exists between objects, situations, or relationships. It represents the essence of energy or intention that can be felt or experienced in that particular space, or a pause in the movement or flow. Physicists have discovered that the universe is made of energy waves and that every moment of our reality is a wave function collapsed from probability by a conscious observer. This means that our world is a product of our consciousness. Realities are not fixed but ever-changing creations we bring forth, both individually and collectively, through our beliefs and actions. As astrophysicist James Jeans put it: “The universe looks more and more like a great thought rather than a great machine” (1931, 137).³

By assimilating the blue hues and tonal qualities of the sea, *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* invites the audience to experience water as a spatial entity. In this way it also explores the in-between-ness I have been exploring throughout my artistic research, as the idea evolves into spacial form, particularly in terms of water, a fluid entity that evokes a place that is not a place. In contrast to Marc Augé’s (1995/2023) concepts of non-places and supermodernity, spaces of transience where individuals remain anonymous and do not establish social bonds, this non-place or in-between-ness includes viewers by encouraging them to bring their own interpretation to the piece.

Water is estimated to be one of the most abundant molecules in the universe. Like most living systems it also displays a high degree of coherence. This has led researchers and philosophers to connect entanglement with numinous feelings of connectedness and conscious awareness in a way similar to Carl Jung’s synchronicity and collective unconscious. In terms of memory and imagination, Claudiu Murgan’s science fiction novel *Water Entanglement* (2018) asks when will we understand that water has memory? *Water Lore Practice, Place and Poetics* (2022) focuses on a number of affinities between water and imagination in contemporary fiction and nonfiction, asking what it would be like to attempt a thinking-with-water. All of these ideas make up a framework for my thinking-with Kristeva through film, in terms of the semiotic chora, intertextuality and my use of the tripartite ideas of in-between-ness, being-in-between and transitory strata.

3 In the *Mysterious Universe* Jeans (1931) was evidently aware of Plato’s early philosophical perplexities as well as more recent ones of quantum theory, general relativity and quantum mechanics.

Exploring entanglement through a philosophical, aesthetic lens, Alva Noë, debates styles of seeing for painting and the pictorial arts. In trying to describe the phenomenon, he states: “Artworks—keeping with pictures—are puzzle objects in all the ways that the pictures in the newspaper or in the ad only exceptionally *ever* are. Indeed, they are, I would go *so far as to say*, philosophical objects” (2023, 43). Noë continues by describing pictures as proxies, a kind of graphene and dictograph comparative to written words and ways of using them: “We treat the mark on paper as if it were the word, and thus we use the device as a token of thinking about and better understanding ourselves as users of the word. This substitution is not exactly conscious, but it is not unwitting or misguided either” (2023, 58–59).

Working with this idea of juxtaposition, *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* embraces several sensitive forms depicted in unexpected scenarios, such as the slow unfolding of an underwater fern, projected upwards towards the aperture of the circular domed roof of a medieval dovecot, creating the illusion of the antithesis of an abyss. The warm turquoise and deep blues of the seascapes, and the subtle grey hues of the distant hills and mountain peaks, contrast vividly with the blacks and dark browns of interior architectural spaces and contemporary galleries. A quote from Tacita Dean, appropriated and transcribed over these images, establishes and disrupts the horizon through the text’s fragmented appearances.⁴ The experimental sound created by Susan Matthews for the film establishes a discord with the images, producing a tension that emphasizes the cool blue of the film’s intended color palette.

I am intuitively drawn to the color blue within my films, responding to Kristeva’s account of the color as well as Susanne Ferwerda’s, in her article, *Blue Humanities and the Color of Colonialism* (2024). Ferwerda analyzes the lapis lazuli series by Dutch artist Pieter Paul Pothoven and the performance of the poem *Unity* by Aotearoa New Zealand poet Selina Tusitala Marsh, to argue that blues address colonial inheritances and critique colonial desires. As Pothoven’s work shows, the color blue has built empires, taken lives, and altered environments. In contrast, Kristeva writes about the colors used in Giotto’s frescoes, and in particular how the overwhelming shades of blues translate “instinctual drives into colored surface” (1980, 210). Kristeva draws on color perception theory and infant vision development to argue that blue has a quality beyond identity. A possible hypothesis, following Andre Broca’s paradox that (to see a blue light, you must not look directly at it) “would be that the perception of blue entails not identifying the object; that blue is, precisely, on

4 See Yentob (2018, 24:37).

this side of or beyond the object's fixed form; that it is the zone where phenomenal identity vanishes" (qtd in Ferwerda 2024, 7).

The role of location within my films has also always been significant, particularly place and site-specificity. In creating *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, the locations, which included the Czech Republic, Tenerife and Wales, synthesized my original analogue films shot over 20 years with current digital footage. This was the first time I had combined different film media footage to create a new non-linear narrative, and one that reflected, both spatially and temporally, the juxtapositions of my own life.

My filmmaking is a process of writing as much as recording, echoing the automatic writings of André Breton and the surrealist circle, particularly the women surrealists. There is a decisive act of picking up the pen, switching on the computer, pressing the shutter or record button, and then a release into an imaginary world. I therefore relate to the intuitiveness of working in film and artist moving image. The process prompts thinking through the lens. My practice occurs throughout the duration, from the scoping of initial ideas, locations and people to synergizing intuitive and reflective practice in the editing, presentation and dissemination processes.

This conditional framework has enabled my practice to remain intuitive, reflective, and also responsive while operating upon different levels of consciousness. Through the unique use of the video camera, the editing process, and analogies and cross-readings between theory and practice, my work, beginning with my creative experimental dream films, explores non-linear preverbal spaces. These films visualize a re-interpretation of sleep, the unconscious and experiential time and spatial elements through audio-visual technologies. *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* drew upon and developed out of this work which began with *Drift*, staged sleep performances created in the Sleep Research Unit at the University of Charleroi, Belgium, with Dr Myriam Kerkhofs in 2004. They then continued with a Wales Art International (WAI) funded project, *The Dream Space*, during my first visit to Japan in 2007.

2.2 *The Dream Space*

While on my research trip to China, Mongolia and Japan in 2007, I travelled via the Trans-Mongolian railway. My journey through Asia gave me the opportunity to experience time and sleep in different locations and to explore its meaning to other cultures. This relationship to travelling became paramount in my photography and film work. By investigating the politics of location, I also examined what sleep and the body meant cross-culturally and in different spaces.

Figure 14.2 *The Dream Space: Drifting on a Pink Cloud*, moving image, duration 9'28". 2007. Japan

Figure 14.3 *The Dream Space: Yoro Park*, performance installation. 2007. Japan

Figure 14.4 *The Dream Space: MOBIUM*, mobile museum. 2007. Japan

Through lens-based media, I explored time and what it might mean as a woman to be staging sleep performances in different spaces and locations. Sleep was looked at from a physical viewpoint, and through the unconscious and imagination through dreaming. As my interest in dreaming evolved, coming to fruition in Japan through research for *The Dream Space*, I became increasingly interested as well in how dreaming allows entrances to simultaneous time zones.

The photography and films created as part of *The Dream Space* explored time along with sleep experiences in contrasting spaces in Japan, from the capsule hotels designed for speed and mass capitalization, to a Buddhist temple, requiring reflection, ritual and spirituality. The work also questioned the notion of a separation between observer and observed, as I investigated the varying viewpoints of the camera lens and explored what happens when women are on both sides of the camera.

The Dream Space was a collaborative project with visual and sound artists Rachael Kearney, Takeko Akamatsu and Yosuke Kawamura. The preliminary artworks were exhibited and toured Japan via MOBIUM (a mobile museum). Venues included the Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and the University of Nagoya.

3 **Tripartite Structure: In-between-ness, Being In-between and Transitory Strata**

As part of the creative research process, the dream films explored and visualized Kristeva's concepts of semiotic chora and monumental time. Reflecting upon these ideas within the digital revolution then gave rise to the concepts that I see as forming a tripartite structure and identify as in-between-ness, being in-between and transitory strata. In-between-ness refers to a conceptual, reflective public space within collaborative arts and science practice. In this sense, in-between-ness is a system which allows an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary methodology through whose approaches and media two different subjects may meet. As such the practice moves between different modes, responding uniquely to the qualities of individual artists and institutions.

Being in-between is a space that oscillates between the public places of in-between-ness and the personal preverbal space of transitory strata. Transitory strata are preverbal, personal spaces which draw from Kristeva's semiotic chora and which, through the making of experimental dream films, visualize a feminist re-interpretation of passive/active sleep, the unconscious, and experiential time. This differs from the split or divided self as it pertains to fleeting parallels of time that exist within the creatives or the depressives state

of being. This ephemerality is discovered within the individual, lying amidst the layers of consciousness, the realms of waking, reverie and wakefulness. These experiences seldom occur whilst asleep, but can be stirred by direct sensitivity to sounds, which, when heightened under extreme moments of creativity, stress or illness, can take a person on a more profound pathway through abstract associations and internal ruminations. These journeys, or transitory strata, have the ability to both build and fragment, and the dream films aim to echo this on the level of the unarticulated and the unutterable.

Returning to Japan 17 years on from my initial artist's residency brought with it a feeling of displacement, not only from the extremely visceral effects of my inert circadian rhythm and that of others surrounding me, but also from the sense of being in-between. Creating new footage and films whilst in Japan in 2023, and ruminating on the unmeasurability of time, I was also, in solitary moments, further advancing the concept of transitory strata. The results are to be exhibited in various iterations on time in collaboration with sound artist Susan Mathews, from May 2025.

In the following sections I consider the work of some visual artists and cultural theorists through the tripartite structure of in-between-ness, being-in-between, and transitory strata. My aim is to explore the unmeasurability of time through poetic nonlinear methodologies. For example, in terms of the visual artists, my idea of the split or divided self recalls Trinh T. Minh-ha's practices, while the idea of layers of consciousness speaks to Tacita Dean, both as supporting my temporal configuration, and as revealing where my work moves beyond their conceptions of time.

3.1 *Context*

I have established various approaches to collaborating with people and sites, mediating between the physical act of filmmaking, the subconscious realm of knowledge, and arts and science research. While filming in unfamiliar locations or conditions, the process commences with an initial plan but always allows for serendipitous situations to occur.

This practice charts a multifaceted research journey. The initial emphasis focused on cyclical, maternal, and monumental time; to synthesize scientific debates in sleep, the unconscious, and melancholia with current dialogues in women's films. In order to investigate the spaces that lay between these states I engaged with Julia Kristeva's key texts, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) and *Women's Time* (1979), examining women's sleep from a feminist, artistic and scientific gaze, both through an initiated Artist Residency, *Drift*, at the Sleep Research Centre of the Charleroi University Hospital and then in the film *Drifting on a Pink Cloud*, which formed part of *The Dream Space*, touring exhibition in Japan.

Figure 14.5 *Drift*, Artist Residency, Sleep Research Centre, Charleroi University Hospital, Belgium

By studying the poetics of image and text in the in-between states of wake and sleep, women's time was visualized via feminist cultural theory on time and location.

In exploring Kristeva's semiotic chora, women's time and intertextuality my dream films are created in cycles and staged in a variety of locations and in-between spaces such as on the Trans-Mongolian Railway, in a capsule hotel in Japan, and in a council flat in East London. The intention is to offer the viewer a translation of how we may encounter and be affected by time, just as time, in all its varieties, appears as a mechanism through which to formulate the in-between-ness of significant artistic methodologies such as collaborative practice.

The methodological approach of collaborative arts and science practice initially drew on time and Kristeva's idea of the chora as a preverbal and creative space relating to rhythms, colors and trace. This initial stage takes the form of filmed performances which explore the physicality of the female body within site-specific spaces and staged performances. I was specifically fascinated with the fragmentation and non-linear aspects of time within dreams, the stillness

of the body and activity of the mind, and the unmeasurability of time in this context, given that most dreams are only recalled after the event, upon waking. These issues are also central to Kristeva's interest in how people operate in the symbolic order.

While Kristeva, as a linguist and psychoanalyst is interested in how to deal with the line between the symbolic and the semiotic, using music to help her patients in clinical settings, my methodological approach is not intended as art therapy. Rather I use contemporary art, specifically video and artist moving image, as disciplines in their own right and as creative research. Preverbal and multiple intelligences, such as visual, kinaesthetic and tactile learning are crucial to the study and introduced through objects, which were inscribed with prompts.

My interest in the in-between continued in my work with patients with mental health problems as part of my Artist Residency *Visualising the Invisible* (2009–2010) with Arts Council Wales and the Welsh National Health Service (NHS). Here my research moved from the observation of the physical body to explorations into the invisibility of the mind, using video as a creative tool. This subsequently led to an interdisciplinary three-year art and science funded research project called *In-between-ness* with Arts Council Wales, North Wales Clinical School and NHS Wales, collaborating with artists, psychiatrists and people living with major depression. Paradoxically, it is through the abstract non-linear narrative of dream films that the patients begin to contextualize their world.

Figure 14.6 *In-between-ness*, visual prompts. 2010–2013

The in-between-ness study entailed a three-way process developed between the artists/participants, participants/psychiatrists and psychiatrists/artists. Attempting to create a non-hierarchical relationship in this situation required collaboration and co-creation, which enabled the participants to have authorship of their own artworks. In this way we sought to create an ethical and philosophical awareness of the power-relations inherent in different roles in a hospital, here, for example, those of participants and psychiatrists.

My next work, the artist moving image *Paper Interior* (Karen Heald and Susan Liggett 2013), was created in response to the three year *In-between-ness* arts and science research project. Filmed in daylight in a former hospital—currently a Fine Art institution—*Paper Interior* was performed live as part of the evening preview event of the exhibition *In-between-ness: Using Art to Capture a Sense of Self*. It was inspired by one of the prompts used in the project, to document your day in a variety of ways, and referenced Guy Sherwin's *Paper Landscape* (1975). The film recalled a reverie in its lighting and interior/exterior framing,

Figure 14.7 *Paper Interior*, moving image, performance, installation 2013. Oriel Sycharth, Wales

designed to create a physical, metaphorical and philosophical in-between-ness of space.

Having been first performed live to an audience, the film further incorporated the temporal and spatial as it was later viewed as a staged performance where the film screen was virtually and literally painted, slicing through conscious and unconscious time. *Paper Interior* thus explored different concepts of time and perceptions of reality, in this case for those undergoing antidepressant treatment, a situation where identity is not fixed but slips between different realms of reality. We aimed to evoke a sense of in-between-ness in an attempt to visualize the ephemeral and transitional spaces of the mind. As we literally sliced through the screen and stepped into the gallery space there were gasps from the audience who had not anticipated this action and its configuration of the tripartite in-between-ness, being in-between, and transitory strata.⁵

The dream films are therefore key to the overall process of my work and its paradoxical undertaking of giving a voice to the unutterable, or, perhaps rather, allowing the unutterable to disperse more widely and with a sense of authority and agency. In this way it responds to Gayatri Spivak's work in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), which critiques the tendency of Western intellectuals to speak on behalf of subaltern groups (those who are socially, politically, and economically marginalized), often without allowing them to represent themselves. Spivak's work intersects with the visual in dialogue with artwork by Ecuadorian artist Estefanía Peñafiel Loaiza (2021), whose practice questions visibility and occlusion, and the need for and absence of the image.

Like Spivak and Loaiza, Kristeva recognizes the power of art to unblock important sources of meaning. Although philosophy and psychoanalysis often privilege language and conceptual distinctions, mistrusting the image, Kristeva, a practitioner of both disciplines, explores the ways in which creative acts may counteract and transform feelings of violence and depression on both the individual and the cultural levels. Similarly, my performative use of time-based media, established through a complex collaborative methodology continues to move forward within the arts and science arena, bringing together psychiatric issues, collaboration and film.

My research with creating moving image further expands on Kristeva's chora in relation to time and the concepts referred to earlier: in-between-ness, being in between and transitory strata. These concepts relate to the different spaces within which I operate, such as the space between arts and science disciplines, the collaborative space of working with different people, and the space

5 See Heald (2013). View *Paper Interior* in its entire duration of 9'20" by following the link below: Paper Interior Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/74064501>.

between sleep and dreams. Each environment commences with dialogues with people or places, establishing the parameters of the following stages as various iterations develop the uniqueness of the diverse dream films. My artist philosophical investigation of time thereby investigates the complexities between commonsense views of time and what is viewed through the lens of arts and science, particularly visual arts and physics.

While ideas of time are generally expressed in “non-technical terms such as *now*, *flow*, and *past* and not with technical scientific terms such as *continuum*, *reference frame*, and *quantum entanglement*” (Dowden 2023) we are aware that there may be many further dimensions beyond our ordinary experience.

Quantum entanglement in physics is a phenomenon where the properties of two particles are correlated so that measuring one particle instantly affects the state of the other, regardless of the distance separating them. This idea defies classical notions of locality and has led to intriguing experiments and philosophical debates.

Within my practice something like quantum entanglement occurs through the complexity of film, a medium that operates within time while also disrupting time through its contextual referencing, capture (framing), and use and suspension of duration, pause and tempo through mirror or mirrorless mechanisms. When film enters the realm of installation and artist moving image the dynamics shift even further, to include the contemplations of the audience, readers, viewers.

Like scientific objects, such as the camera and/or our ubiquitous smartphones, our human eyes are internally operated by our brain, entangled within their own time and space. When I am filming, I am fully engaged; I think through the lens. There is something about the time and space between the eye and the lens of the camera that enables me to do so, for example, when working with dancers, the entwining of bodies and the connection that exists between us as humans, or as when interacting with non-humans or attempting to become non-human, we are entwined together in spontaneous and intuitive interactions that exist as experiences within our memories. As an artist-researcher my focus is on visual, tactile and auditory sensations within our perceptions of reality. As with dream spaces which exist through non-linear narratives focusing on different elements—color, rhythm or movement—these operate within different multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary languages which are forever entangled. Hence my continuous paradoxical experiments and explorations within and without space through time-based media⁶ aiming to visualize the

6 Time-based media is a term used by museum curators to describe art that has a duration or unfolds over a period of time. It can include video, film, audio, light, movement, and performance. Time-based media can also be called new media.

invisible. Returning to Noë's comments on entanglement and debates on styles of seeing for painting and the pictorial arts, it seems appropriate here to see artworks—as pictures—as puzzle objects. The connections between serendipity, locations, and site-specific artworks are thus timely given our fluid and ever changing conceptual, ecological, social, and cultural environments.

3.2 *Further Dream Films*

In 2013, following the In-between-ness pilot study, I was invited by interdisciplinary artist Angela Davies to collaborate on an artist residency called *Golau* (*Light*) in Chirk Castle and its gardens and grounds, located in north Wales. Here I explored themes of time and place in response to the architectural framework and geologically sculpted landscape of Chirk Castle, a 12th Century medieval fortress in the Welsh Marches, set within 480 acres and under the auspices of the National Trust. As part of the residency, I collaborated with Angelina Kornecka, an artist and trained Butoh dancer, to create 5 site specific film performances over two intense days. In *Topiary* (Heald, Davies, Kornecka 2014), Kornecka appears grounded, walking along the top of the tall hedgerow in the estate gardens of Chirk Castle. Her movements are slow and deliberate yet precarious, both for her and for me as I filmed the process. The horizon is unstable as Kornecka navigates and traverses the site, meeting herself through cinematic montage, mirrored in screen time. The film offers a diptych of chronological and poetic non-linear time as the virtual present attempts to meet the self, obstructed by the phallic shaped cut topiary.

Figure 14.8 *Topiary*, filmed performance. 2014. Chirk Castle, Wales

Figure 14.9 *Lateral Flight*, filmed performance, duration 3'22". 2014, Wales

Golau (Light) was designed to generate multi-sensory and multidisciplinary responses to the memory of place, here focalized through Chirk Castle. Built in 1310 during the reign of the conquering Edward I, the castle was a symbol of power and a statement of English intent in these disputed lands. The landscape sits between the rivers Dee and Ceiriog along a preserved section of Offa's Dyke, a large linear earthwork that roughly follows the border between England and Wales. Within the wooded grounds lies an old folly which contributed to my site-specific installations and performative works, *Lateral Flight*, *Golau (Light)*, and *Meander*.

The process of the collaboration was an inspiration. Filming in the interior and exterior spaces of Chirk Castle, I worked intuitively with Kornecka. *Lateral Flight*, a film performance that experimented with the horizontal and vertical planes of the film screen, used emotive movements to capture shifts in light and portray intimate moments in time through the camera lens. The editing and presentation process reiterated the Butoh sense of meditation, minimalism and being in-between.

To return to Steyerl:

Imagine that you are falling but there is no ground. Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness. We cannot assume

any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best we are faced with temporary contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be permanent, or at least an intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?

2012, 13

Reflecting this intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike, I filmed Kornecka in *Lateral Flight* in a continuous long take, as her body slowly and vertically slid down the twisting medieval stairs of the castle, with the silk fabric intermittently rustling against the worn stone steps. In the installation, the film *Lateral Flight* was projected onto a circular photography reflector, reframing the film's form and interaction with the castle's interior architecture and the exterior diffused light entering from the window frame, aiming at a visual re-interpretation of site, the unconscious and experiential time.

Figure 14.10 *Lateral Flight*, moving image, installation. 2014. Chirk Castle, Wales

Figure 14.11 *Golau (Light)*, moving image, installation. 2014. Chirk Castle, Wales

Figure 14.12 *Meander*, filmed performance, installation. 2014. Chirk Castle, Wales

The themes of *Lateral Flight* were reiterated in *Golau (Light)* this time using open-weaved muslin, selected for its opacity, to capture the earlier filmed performance of Kornecka's figure slowly traversing the folly in the grounds of the castle. The installation, like the performance, was fleeting and ephemeral, depending upon the light and changing weather conditions during particular times of, and on particular days. Here, the light from the golden hour pierced through the window and fabric, deflecting onto the walls and floor. The intention here, as in the other dream films, is that the viewer experience a translation of how we may encounter and be affected by time in the in-betweenness of filmmaking and research as collaborative practice.

3.3 *Dream Films, Time, Steyerl, and Kristeva's Writings*

Hito Steyerl, a German-Japanese filmmaker, moving-image artist, writer, and innovator of the essay documentary is a prolific conceptual artist, a professor of experimental film and video, and the co-founder of the Research Centre for Proxy Politics at the Berlin University of the Arts. As noted above, the main concepts that I have been drawn to are her theories of verticality and of the poor image. Steyerl (2011) identifies the present moment as a state of free fall, distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness:

While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise. This disorientation is partly due to the loss of a stable horizon. And with the loss of horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of time and space, throughout

modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, twirl around, and superimpose.

This loss of stability connects also to Steyerl's idea of the poor image which occurs between digital and analogue processes through the degradation of mass-reproduction and distribution through video as a medium, with reference as well to smartphones. The idea also raises questions about imperfect cinema, visual bonds, and their relationships to poor images and society:

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the ordinary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation. In short it is about reality.

Steyerl 2012, 44

As a filmmaker, I relate the ideas of free fall and of the poor image to the time and space of being in-between, a feeling of being in two worlds simultaneously, a liminal space between reality and consciousness. Time is viewed here as an interface between two dynamic states, somehow just beyond the visible. My exploration of time and the perceptions of the clock in *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* also reflects Julia Kristeva's multilayered sense of time, such as cursive time (the time of linear history) and monumental time. As Ananya Tiwari (2017) puts it, for Kristeva: "Monumental time is not a time but rather a particular space where a particular mindset permeates, and can transcend time, space, socio-political and economic conditions, nations etc., which diagonally to each other across [sic] time and space. Symbolic denomination is a part of monumental time."

As Kristeva writes, "the fact that two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to the female subjectivity in so far as the latter is thought of as a necessarily maternal should not make us forget that this repetition and this eternity are found to be fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones" (1979, 17). Thus women's conditions can be linked across the spectrum, via monumental time, irrespective of linear time and socio-economic/national reality.

Kristeva's concept of the chora as semiotic, that is, as the space in which meaning is produced, has acted as a model for my research. Kristeva uses maternal language when discussing the chora, comparing it to the contractions of giving birth and the birth itself. She describes the "'energy' charges as well

as ‘psychical’ marks, [which] articulate what we call a chora: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated and cannot be represented” (1984, 25). Examples might include the preverbal sounds of an infant, the psychotic who has lost the ability to use language in a meaningful way, or the artistic avant-garde, which mobilizes the semiotic in its push for originality, creativity and critique.

The complexity of Kristeva’s theories in relation to linguistics and feminist critical theory has challenged me to create the unrepresentable or the unspeakable through moving image. In collaborations with artists operating in a variety of disciplines, I have critiqued and engaged with Kristeva’s propositions to give a re-interpretation of time.

Tacita Dean is renowned for such pioneering and poetic 16mm and 35mm films as *FILM* (2011) and *Antigone* (2018), which experiment with the medium of celluloid film and narrative. Dean frequently employs rotational or circular movements within her films, which act as indicators of time in an actual, cinematic and psychological, coming together through unconventional framings of familiar scenes. In earlier films such as *Disappearance at Sea* (1996) Dean captured close-ups of the rotating lighthouse bulbs while the distant horizon is only glimpsed through the glass. In *Fernsehturm* (2001) Dean filmed a restaurant inside the rotating TV tower in Berlin using 16mm film and an anamorphic lens which achieved a wide angle and long rectangular view. Filmed for 44 minutes at twilight it captured both the changing exterior light and the interior narratives. Although reminiscent of *Disappearance at Sea* in its focus, here the framing resides on the restaurant’s interiors, with the primary vista seen only from a sideways perspective, punctuated with gestures from diners pointing outwards. Describing the work, Dean wrote:

Like the perpetual rotation of the spacecraft in Stanley Kubrick’s ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’, a conceit to maintain gravity on board ship, the *Fernsehturm* restaurant continues to turn almost imperceptibly like the movement of the planets in Space. It was visionary in its concept and a symbol of the future, and yet it is out of date. The *Fernsehturm* embodies the perfect anachronism ... As you sit up there at your table, opposite the person whom you are with, and with your back to the turn of the restaurant, you are no longer static in the present but moving with the rotation of the Earth backwards into the future.

Dean and Groenboom 2000

Dean’s practice encompasses an intertextuality of image and text informative for my idea of in-betweenness, not only through her film montages but also in her drawings, paintings, photographs, and installations. Her recent work,

Figure 14.13 Tacita Dean (2001), *Fernsehturm*, 16mm film, TV Tower, Berlin

Geography / Biography (2023), commissioned by the Bourse de Commerce in Paris, is a sophisticated collage of her life in film shown via two synthesized 35mm projectors mounted on a spinning platform with backgrounds from a personal collection of postcards depicting plant life, landscapes and ancient statues. A catalogue accompanying the exhibition acts as an additional archive of the work. Time here is her material⁷ since alongside film montage of Dean's life, are interspersed the slow paced artist's film-portraits of elderly men such as Claes Oldenburg (2011) and David Hockney (*Portraits*, 2016), all imbued with a sense of waiting.

Just as Dean's work is informed by time, Minh-ha's book *D-Passage* (2013) documents her feature film *Night Passage* (2004) and installation *L'Autre marche* (*The Other Walk*) (2006). Reflecting on these works she discusses the impact of new technology on cinema culture and creative practice while exploring several of her major themes, such as temporality, transitions and transcultural encounters. The sensitivity with which she discusses ways of

⁷ Sean Burns. "Time is Tacita Dean's material." *Freize*, issue 237. EU Reviews, Exhibition Reviews. June 14, 2023. <https://www.frieze.com/contributor/sean-burns>.

Figure 14.14 Tacita Dean (2023), *Geography / Biography*, exhibition, Bourse de Commerce, France

seeing and knowing, along with the implications of the media used, the artistic practices engaged in, and the representations created, comes from the synthesis between theory and practice. *D-Passage* indivisibly weaves form and structure, rhythm and movement, language and imagery through essays, artistic statements, and in-depth conversations, all joined with the script of *Night Passage*, movie stills, photos, and sketches. This multi-disciplinary approach has also been very important for my own work.

4 Conclusion

Thinking through the research questions that I raised at the beginning of the chapter brings me also to work I was invited to create for *Heterotopic Encounters*, an exhibition at an artist studio, UnDegUn. The 2019 exhibition included colleagues and artists (former students) and invited audience engagement. The dialogue started with a quote from Michael Phillipson written in 1995:

Under the intensity of creative experimentation (the situation and challenge of artists' practice) each work asks itself (and therefore us, too)

Figure 14.15 *Heterotopic Encounters*, moving image, installation. 2019. UnDegUn, Wales

whether there might be a ‘place’ where culture has not yet reached; it hopes to be that ‘place’—an elsewhere that is not yet a ‘place’ on culture’s terms.⁸

I was, accordingly, interested in the visual dialogues and conversations between artists who reside within the artistic space of UnDegUn, both those collaborating and visitors experiencing the event. Given the recent precarious nature of the location, its temporary lifespan, and the early closure of the exhibition due to the COVID-19 pandemic that transversed the globe, this was especially poignant and significant.

The two films I exhibited had been brought together and re-framed for the first time at UnDegUn, in my hometown of Wrexham. The films shown explored the apertures and mechanics of the camera, the unconscious and the active/passive role of the female in the landscape.

The first film *Untitled IV* (2001) is a silent video, filmed along the Irwell Valley Sculpture Trail in Salford. It explores Salford’s industrial heritage, the graphics of line, tone and form, Rosika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch*, and the idea that when sleeping the brain is still active. *Pra I* (2004) is one of two films that reflect upon early experimental Czech cinema; it was filmed through a viewing device along the river Vltava that flows through Prague, whilst attending an international conference on sleep. Both films are influenced by Julia Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic chora and my notion of transitory strata and in being brought together many years later also incorporate time as such into the installation.

Installing the work I experimented and played with the projection screens, the bleeding out of light and sound, the piano score, the grain and aesthetic

⁸ Phillipson, Michael. 1995. “Managing Tradition: The Plight of Aesthetic Practices and Their Analysis in a Technoscientific Culture.” In *Visual Culture*, edited by C. Jencks, 202–3. London and New York: Routledge.

tonalities of analogue films, and the objects themselves, sourced from artists and found in the space, all of which are to be celebrated. The interactive overlaps, such as the found piano which I brought into my space, acted as invitations for people to continue to play and experiment with the work throughout and beyond the exhibition.

Thinking about play and experimentation on returning to Japan and experiencing the people, landscape and culture of the country for a second time, brought new and distant memories, of loss, displacement, sensory experiences and new friendships. In the film *Forgetting Vietnam* (2016), Minh-ha, following her father's passing, explored the relationship between the human and nonhuman through the abstraction of love, which she described as encompassing more than feelings and emotions, and as that which connects us. In this film Minh-ha explores Vietnam, approaching: "... Her as a body of water—a reality manifested in the overall texture of Vietnamese life; a reality implied in the Vietnamese term *nu, o, c*, meaning both water and country".

Water has been a current theme within my work from as far back as 2001 when I created short films such as *Frozen Seas* and *Intangible Fluidity*, up to 2023 with this first iteration of the artist moving image *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*. For this new film I sourced my own film archive spanning over two decades and created a new film to synthesize analogue and digital arts footage from various locations including the Czech Republic, Tenerife and Wales. I experimented with expanding and compressing perspective and included

Figure 14.16 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, moving image, 10'06". 2023. Wales, Tenerife, Czech Republic

Figure 14.17 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, film still. 2023. Wales, Tenerife, Czech Republic

text to subvert the flat two-dimensional screen. The disharmonious piano sounds were intended to further disturb and distort the visual and textual imagery presented to the audience in its multiple contexts on a single channel video—from the art exhibition to the video essay relayed at the conference.

My films frequently speak as well to a painterly textural aesthetic. These reflections on film, texture, smell and tactile knowledge appeared in *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* as I conjured up what a space in Japan with an international audience of interdisciplinary scholars and artists focusing on the theme of time and measure might be. One of my initial prompts was thus this quote by Tacita Dean (2000):

One hears or looks at a film; but one can only literally touch, taste and smell a piece of celluloid. Perhaps it is necessary to return here to the notion of film as event rather than a mere spectacle, instead of centering on the screen, the viewer's experience of film is also engaged in the extra-screen space—that is, the movie-house space of the immediate environment.

I am reminded here of a practice in Japanese Kabuki theatre, devised to heighten the audience's sensual experience through the play with the extended notion of the stage and the many uses of passageways(s) (*hanamachi*).

Figure 14.18 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, film stills. 2023. Wales, Tenerife, Czech Republic

In *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* I fragmented Dean's quote into segments and superimposed the text onto the moving image to reimagine alternative spaces, particularly in unfamiliar locations. The rhythmic movement of the sea and at times its circular motions added to the drama and the serendipity of the occasion, enabling time and space to unfold so things or events can play out.

Minh-ha, in an interview with Shivani Radhakrishnan (2022), stated that despite feeling strongly on certain issues she doesn't enter projects with

Figure 14.19 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*, film still. 2023. Wales, Tenerife, Czech Republic

preconceived ideas. However, a constant within her work is: “the question of cinema and of writing—how the creative tools at work define my activity in relation to a specific subject or a specific course of events. Or better yet, the way a work breathes, moves, pauses, and rests.”

Interviewed by Alan Yentob, as part of the *Imagine* series, Dean ruminates on why we become who we become or do as we do, saying it remains for the most part unknown to us, the most mysterious question being why artists become artists, and why they become the artists they are. Like Dean, I do not want to know what the outcome is before I have taken the journey, and along with Dean I think that that is the one thing I can identify with in terms of our process. As Dean says, this makes the process harder but: “I think I need to have a bit of invisibility about myself ...” (Yentob 2018).

The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass is an ongoing project in collaboration with sound artist Susan Matthews which will transform into a triptych installation and site-specific intervention containing audio/visual technologies and a variety of objects. This is intended for international contemporary galleries as well as relevant exterior locations in Wales and beyond. The re-contextualization and re-siting of the work is a significant part of the process which is designed to span several years and repetitions.

Time is a material which appears to become more unmeasurable and messy the further I explore it, creating more questions than answers. For example, in-between-ness is becoming spatial, a factor that is particularly powerful in

Figure 14.20 *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass*. Panorama photograph. 2023. Potential installation site. Japan

The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass, which features unfamiliar locations. The spatial in-between-ness within my film conveys water as a kind of place that is not place, in contrast to Minh-ha's concept of Vietnam as a body of water or Dean's moving backwards into the future via the Earth's rotation. Through visual analysis of artist moving image and poetic nonlinear aspects of time this transition between the tripartite system, in-between-ness, being in-between, and transitory strata, can, with audience interaction, contribute to a new filmic landscape.

Could then the location above, visited by me while I was in Japan in 2023 become a potential new site for further iterations of *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* film?

The essay concludes with the weblink to the first iteration of *The Timekeeper and the Hour Glass* (2023) for viewing and processing by the reader/audience with comments welcomed. Follow the link below to view the film in its current single channel format: <https://www.karenheald.co.uk/films>.

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