

Slowness and Suffering: Critical approaches to temporalities of violence

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The accelerated pace of life, along with rapid technological transformations, are often experienced as violent temporal registers. Slowness often comes as a response and is constructed as a deliberate resistance and subversion to the dominance of speed. Yet, slowness can also be experienced as a hegemonic temporal regime. In this vein, recent scholarship has sought to suggest slowness as equally violent, perhaps triggering a much more intricate mode of suffering than the one speed supposedly causes. Terms such as slow violence (R. Nixon, 2011) or slow death (L. Berlant, 2011) are creating a theoretical 'armoury' for the description of forms of violence that cannot be sensed or seen immediately. Central – but not limiting – aspects of this discussion are the temporality of waste (e.g. toxic) and the looming consequences for those who, often unwittingly, face them; the marginalised temporalities of the residual effects of colonisation; the temporal gap in terms of visibility between the violence of events of human/non-human death or suffering and their socio-political 'ruins.' Time passes, but indeed its experience varies for different social, cultural, and political entities. How are we to apprehend and critically assess such hidden/invisible and extended forms of violence? How are artists responding to the slowness of violence or the violence of slowness? How are museums using slowness as a curatorial device for knowledge production? How do different mediums produce a differentiated experience of slowness? This session seeks to gather artistic, political and philosophical responses to the significance of slowness as a temporal register.

Speakers and Abstracts

Mucus Streams: Performing the undead in Martin O'Brien's *The Unwell*

Gabriella Beckhurst (University of York)

Performance artist Martin O'Brien's tooling of the zombie as a metaphor for the sick body links apocalyptic figures to respiratory politics. Combining durational performance, physical endurance and pain-based practices, his work eschews dominant biomedical and 'survivor-hero' narratives of living with chronic illness, politicising what it means to be sick and queer. In O'Brien's film *The Unwell* (2016), made with Suhail Ilyas, the zombie – rather than mindless urban interloper – frames a desirable post-human figure capable of thriving in periods following numerous extinctions. While, in the mucus-filled pastoralism of O'Brien's writing, those 'used to the mucus' thrive amidst toxic soils ('The Daydream'). This paper considers how O'Brien's zombie has purchase for thinking through chronic and affective registers of harm, specifically as they intersect 'doomed' rhetorics of contagion and environmental ruin. The zombie is neither attritional nor calamitous; a figure who dwells for unending periods in the aftermath of violence and for whom disintegration is sustained. Rob Nixon defines slow violence as 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight' (2011). Its dispersal across time and space, whether accretive, degradative, or staggered, presents significant obstacles to conveying the effects of unfolding environmental catastrophe. The zombie's biopolitical status bucks the natural order of life/death, transforming scales of liveness, durability and expectancy as they inform societal attitudes around suffering. I thus query whether the zombie – a figure who is neither alive nor dead, but for O'Brien, *undead* – might be opened out to environmental work dealing with the unrepresentable temporal logics of the Anthropocene.

Slow Aesthetics and (Repro)Futurity: The temporalities of *Nuclear Waste*

Ruby de Vos (University of Groningen)

This paper presents a reading of the slow aesthetics in *Nuclear Waste* (2012), a short film by Miroslav Slaboshpitskyi. The film renders visible the slow temporal modalities of nuclear waste – especially its slow material disintegration (over ten thousands of years) and its slow, violent effects on the body (Nixon 2013) – by showing the daily working routines of a couple trying to get pregnant while working on the clean-up of radioactive material in a nuclear waste facility. I argue that *Nuclear Waste* employs aesthetic and affective strategies used in 'slow cinema' to emphasise the entanglement of several nuclear temporal scales. Crucially, the film suggests these different temporal scales are tied up with conflicting politics and

imaginaries of the future. While storing the toxic waste is an endeavour undertaken for the sake of generations to come, achieving such a safe future for 'our children' means that some people need to do the dirty work of cleaning up that material. In the process; they subject themselves to the slow violence of radiation, which may – among other things – affect their reproductive systems, disrupting notions of reprofuturity (Edelman 2004). Paradoxically, then, the attempt to retain the deep future for some forecloses the possibility of extending into the near future for others. Ultimately, this paper will outline how *Nuclear Waste* employs multiple aesthetic strategies of slowness to attune the viewer to how these temporal scales play out across the politics of waste, the body, and imaginaries of the future.

Glass and Radioactivity: The Violence of Endurance

Taisuke Edamura (J F Oberlin University)

In 2015, American artist Trevor Paglen created a cube out of irradiated glass collected from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant exclusion zone, where it has been placed ever since as one of the artworks for 'Don't Follow the Wind', the ongoing inaccessible exhibition on site. The work is titled *Trinity Cube* as its core contains Trinitite, a vitreous mineral which was born of the fallout from the Trinity nuclear bomb test conducted on 16 July 1945 in New Mexico. This paper will focus on the close relationship between glass and radioactivity through the theme of endurance and its violence against our bodies and the environment. Such violence is often invisible and takes many forms. Paglen's cube reminds us of the vitrified high-level radioactive waste encapsulated in metal containers, which will eventually be stored deep underground, with the indelible risk of radiation leakage. Hiroshima or Nagasaki exemplifies another. When the bomb detonated, flying glass from blasted windows pierced countless citizens. According to survivors' accounts, tiny shards thrust deep into their body often resist diagnostic imaging and surgical removal, remaining hidden as a haunting source of their mundane physical pain. A similar apparition indeed plagues recent nuclear disaster victims, who cannot help but to attribute any unwellness to invisible contamination. As a possible corrective to our grasp of slow time, this paper seeks a better (in)sight of these vitreous and radioactive temporalities through examining relevant artistic and scientific explorations.

Time and Tide: Dimensions in contemporary Chicano art, countering slow cultural subjugation of Mexican-American society

Sally Mincher (Freelance scholar)

With predominant insouciant attitudes towards the actuality that Mexicans and their descendants have lived in what is now the Southwest United States of America since the 16th century, this region engenders a complex temporality of entwined multiple cultural histories. The formation of cultural identity for the Mexican-American population has involved processes of subordination and struggle since The Mexican War in 1848 to present-day politics of xenophobia and exclusion.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano Art Movement emerged as part of the massive wave of civil rights across the USA. Artists formed a crucial part in the activism of *El Movimiento* (The Chicano Movement). These artists extrapolated from earlier modes of political expressions generated during preceding decades such as in: the cultural flow between Mexico and the USA following the Mexican Revolution (1910), the workers movements (1920s and 1930s) and resistance to McCarthyism (1950s).

Despite 1960s eclecticism and the rise of a 'counter-culture', art that sprung from *El Movimiento* was marginalised and deemed insignificant by the hierarchical mainstream. Nevertheless, Chicano artists continued the drive to generate interactions between people, teams of artists, and social contexts developing a different approach to addressing changing values in society. Their challenge has been to evoke new meanings from the traditional.

This paper examines how contemporary Chicano artists make time a dynamic force in particularly significant configurations of cultural vernacular and historical tropes to demonstrate a temporal contiguity between positive conceptions of collective identity and the slow violence of Anglo hegemonic domination of this social group.

Slowness as Eco-critical Strategy in David Claerbout's *The pure necessity* (2016)

Toni Ross (UNSW Art & Design, UNSW Sydney)

The pure necessity is a 50-minute video animation produced by Belgian artist David Claerbout and a team of 2D animators. It involved redrawing frames from Disney's *The Jungle Book*, a musical comedy animation for children released in 1967. Loosely based on Rudyard Kipling's 19th-century children's stories set in British colonial India, the Disney film tells the tale of a young boy (Mowgli), abandoned in the jungle as an infant, who is both nurtured and threatened by a cast of talking, singing and dancing wild animals. Claerbout's remake dispenses with Mowgli and the anthropomorphised jungle creatures of the Disney film. Instead, the same cast of animals are shown doing precisely nothing, at least nothing that lends itself to human-centred narrative cinema. Unfolding at a glacial pace, devoid of visual spectacle and humanised cartoon animals, *The pure necessity* has been described as profoundly soporific.

Claerbout is known for amplifying slowness in video and photography as a critical counterpoint to the hyper activity that fuels neoliberal capitalism's insatiable appetite for surplus accumulation. *The pure necessity* prolongs this strategy, while also inviting reflection on the implicit violence of representing wild animals as mere ciphers of human needs, values and emotions. Comparing the visuals, temporal rhythms and sounds of *The Jungle Book* and Claerbout's remake, this paper situates the latter as responding critically to the 'slow violence' (Rod Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011) of mass extinctions of wild life and habitat destruction resulting from globalisation.