

[Candidate X] Silent, Fleeting, Unrepeating: How Duration in Performance can
Challenge our Perceptions of Time

“She’s going to hold her breath until she gets a new one.”

- Margo, on Agnes’ disintegrated unicorn, *Despicable Me*

This document is the extended edition of the candidate’s main essay.

Consider

the

following

pangram

While

sipping

coffee

the

velvety

antelope

quietly

perused

the

jumbled

quiz

then

after

a

nap

it

rode

a

bike

to

the

beach

and

sandcastled

excessively

with

its

friends

If

you

had

waited

five

full

seconds

between

reading

each

word

of

just

that

one

sentence

you

would

have

taken

over

a

minute

and

a

half

to

get

from

the

beginning

to

the

end

Now

consider

how

it

would

feel

to

read

this

essay

if

each

word

were

given

its

own

page

your

reading

experience

would

be

prolonged

considerably

Would

the

ample

space

afforded

to

each

word

somehow

give

it

more

apparent

value

and

thus

make

it

more

impactful

like

a

single

napkin

served

by

a

waiter

on

a

large

silver

tray

perhaps

Or

would

you

find

yourself

scrolling

through

this

extended

document

faster

and

faster

each

word

losing

more

and

more

apparent

value

as

you

tried

to

read

as

normally

as

you

could

In

my

view

the

only

thing

that

would

have

changed

between

this

text

and

the

extended

edition

is

the

duration

of

buffer

space

between

each

word

and

the

overall

time

required

to

read

the

document

in

its

entirety

What

can

this

teach

us

about

the

act

of

reading

Now

let

us

consider

the

same

set

of

questions

when

it

comes

to

performance

If

a

piece

were

to

be

drawn

out

beyond

an

average

of

say

forty

minutes

to

last

for

a

new

duration

of

forty

hours

forty

days

or

even

forty

years

how

might

this

performance

piece

challenge

our

perceptions

of

time

Our

perceptions'

plural

as

they

relate

to

the

overall

duration

of

the

piece

as

well

as

individual

moments

within

the

work

whether

they

be

thrilling

and

fast

paced

slow

or

silent

Indeed

how

does

work

that

has

been

recorded

add

further

meaning

to

our

perceptions

of

time

during

its

playback

And

what

realisations

does

durational

work

lead

us

to

especially

where

it

concerns

the

nature

of

humanity

in

performance

and

audience

in

terms

of

our

awareness

as

thinking

waking

sleeping

animals

Furthermore

when

a

piece

involves

the

object

as

performer

what

new

insight

does

durational

performance

give

us

into

our

own

durational

existence

In

this

essay

will

address

these

questions

in

relation

to

three

durational

works

with

reference

to

the

relevant

discussion

contributed

by

various

arts

commentators

A

link

to

this

paper's

extended

edition

mentioned

above

is

included

in

the

bibliography

There

is

no

Devolution

only

Evolution

Continuously

Unfolding

The

first

durational

performance

piece

will

discuss

here

offers

both

extremes

of

duration

It

is

the

piece

that

took

the

longest

to

perform

but

takes

only

minutes

for

the

viewer

to

witness

posthumously

Time

Clock

Piece

is

the

informal

title

of

a

one

year

performance

undertaken

between

1980

and

1981

by

Tehching

a

k

a

Sam

”)

Hsieh

It

involved

a

promise

by

the

artist

to

punch

a

Time

Clock

in

my

studio

every

hour

on

the

hour

for

one

year

Hsieh

1980

).

The

piece

was

documented

with

photographic

stills

taken

with

a

mm

camera

used

to

record

each

time

Hsieh

punched

the

clock

The

resulting

film

was

intended

to

compress

all

stills

into

a

six

minute

film

played

back

at

frames

per

second

It

is

a

mildly

surreal

experience

to

watch

back

the

abridged

version

of

a

year

of

someone's

life

the

punch

cards

are

half

visible

over

the

artist's

shoulder

and

in

every

second

of

the

piece

the

hourly

progression

of

each

day

accumulates

before

the

card

is

replaced

with

a

fresh

one

see

Figure

).

In

Figure 1: Teching Hseih's 1980-81 Year Long Performance, a.k.a 'Time Clock Piece'

my

view

this

is

an

even

more

striking

detail

of

the

timelapse

than

the

hour

hand

of

the

clock

spinning

continuously

as

it

is

a

more

pronounced

record

of

the

passing

of

each

day

Longitudinally

that

is

on

the

scale

of

minutes

rather

than

seconds

the

passing

of

the

year

is

indicated

by

Hsieh's

hair

growth

from

a

bald

head

at

the

beginning

to

a

long

shaggy

mane

by

the

end

The

contrast

between

the

marked

days

and

the

growing

hair

epitomises

the

different

scales

of

perception

that

this

piece

offers

us

Not

only

are

we

the

viewers

asked

to

consider

the

glacially

slow

and

prolonged

amount

of

effort

that

goes

into

each

second

of

the

footage

but

also

the

less

immediate

contemplation

inspired

by

witnessing

the

timelapse

in

its

entirety

We

accomplish

so

many

things

during

a

year

but

by

framing

his

entire

life

around

this

one

performance

for

that

length

of

time

Hsieh

relinquished

most

of

those

accomplishments

to

maintain

the

artwork

chiefly

he

lost

privilege

of

a

successful

night's

sleep

According

to

Adrian

Heathfield

one

of

the

most

radical

dynamics

of

Hsieh's

performances

is

the

way

that

they

make

art

and

life

simultaneous

so

that

the

two

activities

cannot

be

separated

Heathfield

Jones

2012

pp

).

Responding

to

this

assessment

Hsieh

points

to

the

temporarily

of

the

human

experience

in

relation

to

our

place

in

the

universe

stating

to

present

life

needed

to

use

a

long

duration

One

year

is

a

basic

unit

for

human

beings

to

calculate

their

life

and

it

is

also

the

time

the

Earth

takes

to

circle

the

sun

completely

Heathfield

Jones

2012

pp

).

Here

the

underlying

property

of

performance

is

highlighted

as

art

that

being

duration

This

exposes

the

same

property

as

it

exists

throughout

all

performance

a

forty

minute

stage

play

has

duration

at

its

core

as

an

intrinsic

quality

upon

which

the

rest

of

the

piece

sits

even

if

the

duration

may

be

overshadowed

by

other

elements

of

the

performance

Thus

the

criticality

of

duration

in

all

performance

is

affirmed

by

Time

Clock

Piece

and

champions

the

role

of

time

in

our

wider

existence

as

if

it

speaks

this

truth

for

all

other

work

In

this

performance

it

is

the

temporalities

of

duration

present

that

form

their

vital

lasting

their

continuing

differentiating

and

interrogative

movements

toward

structures

of

representation

formal

conventions

and

institutions

of

power

Heathfield

Hsieh

2009

pp

).

Most

pressing

to

my

contribution

to

this

topic

is

Hsieh's

interrogative

movements

towards

formal

conventions

specifically

those

attributed

to

our

understanding

of

time

The

framework

of

Time

Clock

Piece

questions

any

conventional

understanding

that

considers

the

some

punchings

of

the

cards

as

in

any

way

repetitious

as

the

photographic

documentation

of

these

acts

is

played

back

The

durational

compression

offered

by

the

timelapse

depicts

the

spirality

of

time

that

appears

to

be

circular

see

Figure

).

Colloquial

Figure 2: Plot of spiral progress of card punching compared to the circulating distance of time from midday/midnight.

understandings

of

time

suggest

that

repetition

cyclical

and

recirculation

are

typical

occurrences

Yet

Time

Clock

Piece

is

emblematic

of

the

contrary

truer'

nature

of

time

in

relation

to

the

present

where

the

synthesis

of

time

constitutes

the

present

in

time

It

is

not

that

the

present

is

a

dimension

of

time

the

present

alone

exists

Rather

synthesis

constitutes

time

as

a

living

present

and

the

past

and

future

as

dimensions

of

this

present

see

Figure

).

The

synthesis

is

none

the

less

intratemporal

which

means

that

this

present

passes

Deleuze

1994

pp

).

While

Hsieh's

piece

was

continuous

for

him

),

he

opened

up

his

studio

to

viewings

by

the

outside

world

on

fourteen

separate

occasions

at

least

once

a

month

and

at

the

beginning

and

end

of

the

piece

And

yet

this

piece

does

not

illustrate

how

the

episodic

duration

of

a

work

can

be

spread

across

multiple

days

or

weeks

Stuart

Brisley's

1972

performance

entitled

And

for

Today

Nothing

expands

this

discussion

of

time

much

like

the

capacity

for

time

itself

to

expand

One

Moment

into

a

Thousand

a

Thousand

Moments

as

One

The

logline

or

score

of

the

piece

was

simple

the

artist

lay

fully

clothed

in

a

bath

filled

with

near

unbearably

hot

water

dyed

black

that

contained

unidentified

parts

resembling

offal

Brisley

2018

and

remained

floating

until

the

water

became

so

cold

that

he

could

not

stand

to

be

in

it

a

process

that

took

around

two

hours

).

The

artist

repeated

this

action

every

day

for

two

weeks

Throughout

the

performance

the

room

where

it

took

place

was

open

to

viewers

see

Figure

),

who

watched

for

varying

amounts

of

time

and

eventually

grouped

themselves

into

those

who

stayed

others

who

left

and

then

some

who

returned

ibid

).

For

the

occasional

intermittent

or

continuous

viewer

the

piece

existed

for

between

a

few

moments

a

fair

while

or

for

repeat

viewers

much

of

the

actual

duration

of

the

piece

They

may

have

been

aware

that

the

room

was

booked

to

be

the

scene'

of

the

performance

for

the

full

two

weeks

but

could

have

arrived

in

the

very

beginning

or

the

very

end

and

so

their

impression

of

the

hypothetical

duration

would

have

been

slightly

different

only

tempered

by

the

knowledge

that

the

artist

has

been'

or

will

be'

doing

the

performance

for

the

full

fortnight

Like

Hsieh's

piece

this

is

a

markedly

different

framework

for

the

audience

to

experience

when

compared

with

a

typical

stage

or

screen

performance

Rather

than

being

incapsulated

by

a

fixed

beginning

and

end

point

in

which

the

audience

are

bound

by

etiquette

to

remain

present

and

witness

as

a

crowd

Brisley's

piece

merely

started

with

the

act

and

slowly

attracted

a

stream

of

viewers

who

appeared

in

up

to

groups

of

three

This

was

a

far

more

intimate

affair

then

even

if

lacked

the

performer

audience

connection

at

play

in

a

one

on

one

performance

such

as

Adrian

Howells'

performance

Foot

Washing

for

the

Sole

While

Howells

washed

dried

anointed

with

oils

massaged

and

kissed

the

participant's

feet

Howells

2012

pp

in

every

performance

while

Brisley

was

often

not

aware

whether

there

was

an

audience

Brisley

2018

).

In

this

sense

the

disconnect

heightened

the

silent

stillness

of

the

performance

as

if

Brisley

were

just

a

creature

to

be

observed

existing

as

he

breathed

just

above

the

water's

surface

But

of

course

that's

effectively

what

he

was

until

the

day

ended

the

gallery

house

closed

and

Brisley

could

sleep

It

is

this

element

of

the

structure

of

the

performance

its

apparent

closing

and

reopening

for

the

audience

that

influences

our

perception

of

time

that

perceive

as

human

animals

that

require

sleep

to

function

Each

daily

sleep

wake

cycle

locks

us

into

perceiving

time

at

the

specific

resolution

of

one

day

not

half

a

day

or

two

days

even

if

our

sleep

cycles

fall

out

of

synchronicity

with

the

day

night

rotation

of

the

Earth

And

yet

it

is

in

the

altering

of

the

state

of

consciousness

induced

by

fasting

alcohol

or

lack

of

sleep

Gómez

Peña

pp

where

the

scale

of

this

resolution

can

change

Starvation

or

lack

of

sleep

can

make

the

hours

crawl

by

whereas

alcohol

can

make

them

fly

but

in

their

observation

of

the

barely

active

performance

by

Brisley

the

audience

members

would

have

certainly

felt

the

slow

pace

of

the

activity

and

witnessed

a

dragging

of

time

For

the

artist

each

moment

spent

in

the

bath

would

have

counted

for

very

little

essentially

nothing

when

put

into

the

perspective

of

the

grander

duration

of

the

performance

As

he

lay

in

his

predicament

Brisley

only

needed

to

concentrate

on

maintaining

the

balance

between

air

and

water

Brisley

2018

),

so

would

presume

that

this

occupied

his

attention

for

as

long

as

it

was

not

a

practised

and

thus

automatic

process

Otherwise

his

mind

would

have

been

free

to

wander

and

time

would

have

passed

more

slowly

There

is

a

unique

contrast

of

experience

here

then

to

Time

Clock

Piece

while

Hsieh

was

held

in

constant

captivity

by

the

clock

in

order

to

punch

it

at

the

right

time

which

he

missed

on

occasions

),

Brisley

was

subject

only

to

his

own

will

to

continue

to

endure

the

coldness

of

the

water

or

get

out

and

refill

it

And

since

his

floatation

was

managed

by

his

breathing

it

is

likely

that

each

breath

substituted

seconds

as

the

main

unit

for

the

passage

of

time

In

this

sense

Brisley

is

his

own

clock

and

the

interaction

present

in

Hsieh's

Time

Clock

Piece

between

Hsieh

and

the

time

clock

instead

occurs

between

Brisley's

mind

and

his

body

Yet

both

performances

are

alike

in

that

they

deal

with

the

relationship

between

the

human

and

the

systems

imposed

by

humanity

whether

controlled

by

the

industrial

time

piece

to

measure

work

as

with

Hsieh's

performance

or

impacted

by

the

defeat

of

reformist

aspiration

s

for

a

greater

democracy

ibid

).

Time

Lives

Here

Now

Performing

Objects

Imbued

with

Time

Both

of

these

performances

subsisted

on

the

human

performer

who

realized

them

But

durational

performance

can

also

subsist

on

the

presence

of

the

object

as

performer

and

inspire

a

more

continuous

expansion

of

our

perceptions

of

time

unbeholden

to

the

starts

and

stops

necessitated

by

the

human

cycle

Carcass

is

or

was

a

sculpture

created

in

1986

by

artist

Helen

Chadwick

who

filled

the

tall

square

glass

tower

with

organic

household

waste

see

Figure

).

She

displayed

the

sculpture

in

a

room

of

the

gallery

housing

her

exhibition

entitled

On

Mutability

to

reflect

more

closely

the

exhibition's

overall

title

as

an

emblem

of

death

and

mortality

corruption

and

decay

Wilson

2017

unpaginated

).

The

presence

of

the

organic

components

in

the

sculpture

plant

and

animal

derived

cellular

material

imbued

the

artwork

with

the

life

cycles

of

those

living

organisms

Rather

than

the

object

performing

in

existence

as

perceived

by

the

viewer

the

tower

somewhat

of

a

space

odyssey

monolith

contained

the

active

processes

of

the

cell

living

reacting

decaying

Thus

the

viewer

is

confronted

with

the

reality

of

the

sculpture's

contents

rotting

decomposing

matter

and

is

invited

to

contemplate

their

own

mortality

during

this

spectacle

posit

that

it

is

the

lack

of

human

presence

provided

by

the

object

that

enables

this

reflection

which

naturally

underscores

the

viewer's

gaze

).

The

literal

absence

of

personability

of

seeing

and

inevitably

identifying

with

a

human

performer

offered

by

the

sculpture

leaves

a

blank

earthy

mirror

that

reflects

the

act

of

looking

back

onto

the

viewer

A

sight

such

as

this

should

open

the

doors

of

our

collective

perception

forcing

us

to

hear

the

roar

of

cosmic

energy

that

lies

on

the

other

side

of

silence

and

to

stretch

the

measure

of

what

has

become

possible

Braidotti

2013

pp

).

Furthermore

this

absence

may

prolong

the

act

of

looking

itself

compared

to

And

For

Today

if

the

awkwardness

of

witnessing

another

human

being

experience

the

gradient

of

discomfort

present

in

Brisley's

piece

did

ever

affect

the

duration

of

the

observation

Foreseeably

if

retroactively

so

),

the

only

awkwardness

liable

to

affect

the

duration

of

observation

for

viewers

of

Carcass

rests

with

the

intricacies

of

gallery

viewing

etiquette

whether

one

is

conscious

of

others

either

watching

them

observe

or

waiting

to

assume

the

optimal

proximity

and

viewing

angle

It

is

likely

that

this

latter

variable

was

also

present

in

Brisley's

performance

what

with

there

only

being

room

enough

for

one

viewer

in

the

room

at

a

time

which

would

explain

some

of

the

more

fleeting

audience

members

aside

from

the

room's

foul

odour

).

On

a

more

abstract

level

however

that

the

very

nature

of

organic

matter

is

to

change

and

transform

is

fully

manifested

in

Carcass

The

organic

waste

inside

is

constantly

in

flux

undergoing

the

processes

of

decay

the

bacterium

feeding

inside

themselves

engaging

in

the

opposite

process

regeneration

Though

its

walls

are

composed

of

unliving

unreactive

glass

inorganic

borosilicate

the

contents

that

thrive

inside

Carcass

have

the

gift

of

being

locked

within

the

propagation

of

the

living

their

existence

located

along

the

curve

of

natural

life

from

formation

to

deformation

This

is

an

existential

pleasure

that

even

the

post

humanist

cyborgs

as

described

by

Haraway

in

all

their

futuristic

glory

would

have

none

of

the

good

fortune

that

this

simple

matter

has

as

the

cyborg

would

not

recognize

the

Garden

of

Eden

it

is

not

made

of

mud

and

cannot

dream

of

returning

to

dust

Haraway

2016

pp

).

And

when

it

comes

to

the

end

of

Carcass'

life

cycle

the

imagery

of

the

eventual

leakage

and

deconstruction

of

the

sculpture

is

a

visual

representation

of

these

processes

In

witnessing

this

demise

the

viewer

should

be

reminded

of

the

impermanence

of

all

things

it

is

an

unavoidable

truth

of

all

of

these

three

performances

that

the

events

they

created

will

never

and

can

never

repeat

again

As

with

Brisley's

piece

Carcass

inspires

reflection

on

death

and

decay

two

resultant

properties

of

prolonged

duration

But

unlike

And

for

Today

Carcass

also

offers

commentary

on

our

relationship

with

and

disposal

of

waste

Contingent

with

a

healthy

modum

of

upkeep

household

waste

is

often

seen

as

something

to

be

disposed

of

removed

from

sight

Yet

Chadwick

brings

it

to

the

forefront

of

the

viewer's

attention

and

makes

it

the

focal

point

of

the

work

forcing

them

to

confront

the

materials

that

they

may

have

often

tried

to

part

with

ignore

and

forget

This

material

stacks

up

in

great

volumes

over

the

course

of

a

full

human

life

yet

it

is

seen

as

less

remarkable

an

accrual

than

the

duration

required

to

produce

it

Carcass

as

any

true

monolith

needs

to

inspires

overdue

advancement

in

the

awareness

of

the

conscious

being

to

contemplate

all

that

it

has

discarded

lest

the

debt

long

buried

never

be

repaid

in

spirit

In

all

viewers

who

remember

their

time

in

the

presence

of

Chadwick's

sculpture

there

remains

an

image

the

shadow

of

a

shape

that

lives

on

in

them

long

after

the

death

of

the

sculpture

and

any

subsequent

reconstructions

It

is

the

ideas

of

each

of

these

performances

and

the

impressions

interpretations

and

feelings

that

exist

alongside

them

in

the

mind

of

the

viewer

that

persist

long

after

the

live

durations

of

the

performances

have

elapsed

They

are

all

silent

unencroaching

subtle

works

that

continue

to

challenge

our

perceptions

of

time

though

their

existences

were

fleeting

To

answer

my

first

introductory

question

sans

long

durational

performance

the

notable

duration

which

differentiates

markedly

temporal

work

from

the

typical'

performance

piece

establishes

this

new

performance

as

a

monolith

on

its

own

The

element

of

exhaustive

time

within

these

durational

works

gives

them

a

new

level

of

power

one

that

strongly

invites

witness

and

interpretation

And

although

the

moments

they

created

are

locked

in

a

past

that

is

writing

us

all

further

and

further

away

from

them

with

each

passing

day

and

they

cannot

ever

be

truly

repeated

they

do

not

need

to

be

The

visual

record

that

exists

of

a

work

is

ample

echo

enough

for

the

purpose

of

posthumous

reflection

and

any

compression

in

timelapse

or

expansion

in

the

single

image

of

one

moment

reminds

us

of

our

own

perceptual

subjectivity

that

time

can

be

experienced

and

even

flow

differently

in

different

places

and

for

different

people

To

Speak

quotably

it

is

enough

for

great

art

to

exist

once

even

if

this

makes

it

more

difficult

to

reach

There

is

always

humanity

in

performance

even

when

only

the

object

performs

In

that

case

the

presence

of

the

sculptor

exists

within

the

objects

they

have

displayed

and

like

every

performer

brings

the

signature

of

their

thoughts

pitfalls

and

dreams

to

the

performance

of

the

object

before

during

and

after

the

apparent

duration

of

the

piece

This

is

a

persistent

presence

and

is

indicative

of

a

transcendental

truth

that

our

humanity

extends

beyond

the

beginning

and

end

points

of

our

very

existence

just

like

the

bounding

points

of

a

durational

artpiece

And

happily

as

we

continue

to

make

witness

and

contemplate

works

of

durational

performance

we

will

no

doubt

find

these

recent

challenges

to

our

perceptions

of

time

challenged

yet

again

It

is

essential

that

we

allow

this

to

happen

and

keep

an

open

mind

in

further

scholastic

examination

of

this

topic

hope

attention

is

paid

to

durational

work

performed

in

other

cultures

by

an

even

more

diverse

range

of

artists

with

various

histories

and

perspectives

In

the

vast

freedom

of

experience

offered

by

our

post

humanist

age

expect

this

will

be

inevitable

and

our

perceptions

of

time

are

further

enriched

to

become

ever

more

transcendental

in

the

scheme

of

what

has

been

believed

before.

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