

# The Time View of Contemporary Time-Based Art under Deleuze's "Time-Image" Theory

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines how time-based media art reconfigures the perception of time through sensory, embodied, and technological practices, drawing on Gilles Deleuze's concept of the time-image and "pure optical and sound situations." Moving beyond linear narratives and movement-driven representation, the study explores how contemporary artists treat time as an experiential dimension. Through qualitative visual and sensory analysis of selected case studies—the research investigates how moving images and sound produce immersive temporal experiences. The findings reveal that time-based media art transforms time from an abstract measure into a lived, perceptual condition, blurring boundaries between stillness and movement, and memory and immediacy.*

**Keywords:** *Time-image; Time-Based art; Embodiment; Multisensory experience*

## 1. Introduction

Time-Based Media Art involves artistic processes that occur in the span of time using dynamic media such as video, sound, software, and interactive environments. Based on the National Gallery of Art documentation, time-Based Media works employ technology, including the use of moving images, sound, and digital installations, due to the varied technological and conceptual focuses that range from the 1960s to the present period. Some of the key categories that belong to major art works in this field include video art, experimental films, sound art, and computer art, among others. Temporality is the key component of artistic expressions of the new media form of art. A defining characteristic of "contemporaneity" in contemporary art lies in the progressive dissolution of boundaries between temporality and media, with video art serving as a primary medium inherently constituted by time. Time-Based Art positions time not merely as a formal container but as an essential material and structural component of the work itself. Building upon Gilles Deleuze's theory of the time-image, this artistic practice seeks to move beyond linear narrative frameworks and action-oriented representation, allowing time to emerge as a direct object of sensory and cognitive experience. Through the construction of what Deleuze termed "pure optical and sound situations", time-based art disrupts conventional causal-temporal relations and guides viewers into a liminal experiential zone where memory, perception, and present awareness intersect. Consequently, time-based art can be understood as an extension of Deleuze's cinematic philosophy into a multisensory, spatially distributed artistic domain[1]. As Mary Ann Doane points out, modern visual culture constantly exposes the uncontrollability and instability of time, causing time to overflow from the narrative order and become a crisis-ridden object of perception.

Ontologically, time-based art derives its structural logic from fundamental dimensions of temporality: duration, sequence, and real-time unfolding. Spanning diverse media such as video, film, performance, sound, and computational systems, this practice fundamentally rejects static representation in favor of dynamic, process-oriented inquiry. Its scope includes not only fixed-duration cinematic and acoustic works but also durational installations, algorithmic and generative art, and kinetic or interactive systems whose meaning is inextricably linked to temporal progression.

Technological developments—from the evolution of photography to the rise of digital platforms and computational interfaces—have profoundly expanded artistic engagement with temporality. In 'Cinema 2: The Time-Image', philosopher Gilles Deleuze identifies a conceptual reversal in which 'time ceases to be subordinate to movement' and instead governs it directly. This theoretical shift finds a historical counterpart in the strategies of mid-twentieth-century Italian neorealism, which utilized fragmented narratives, extended duration, and discontinuous editing to destabilize the 'movement-image' characteristic of classical cinema. By resisting linear plot development, these films created conditions

for what Deleuze describes as ‘pure optical and sound situations’—moments in which narrative yields to perceptual immediacy [2].

This idea can also be traced back to Henri Bergson's theory of "duration." Bergson emphasized that real time is not a linear sequence that can be homogenized and quantified, but rather a continuous, indivisible psychological experience. In this sense, time-image is not a representation of real time, but a manifestation of time as a flow of perception and consciousness. This non-linear, non-measurable view of time provides the foundation for contemporary art practices centered on delay, cycle, stagnation, and continuity.

Such pure situations investigate the co-constitution of time and image, effecting an ontological expansion of the spatiotemporal field. Time-based media art thus treats time as immanent to aesthetic experience, inviting viewers into a participatory relationship with the work's unfolding. This paper examines the specific material and perceptual manifestations of pure optical and sound environments within time-based media art. It analyzes how artists deploy duration, audiovisual disjunction, algorithmic processes, and interactive interfaces to produce modes of reception that foreground temporality itself—not as an abstract framework, but as a tangible, affective dimension of encounter [3].

## 2. Time-Based Moving Images and Video

In Deleuze's conceptualization of the time-image, the conventional movement-driven narrative is disrupted in favor of what he terms “pure optical and sound situations.” This mode of expression resists the linear and causal progression of imagery and temporality, organizing itself instead through a logic of discontinuity, fragmentation, and non-chronological arrangement. The resulting form operates not by narrative continuity but through a constructive disjunction of time and image—a visual and temporal assemblage that foregrounds contemplation over action, perception over progression[4].

This approach resonates profoundly with Henri Bergson's philosophy of duration (*durée*), which challenges the spatialized and quantifiable model of time inherited from classical mechanics. For Bergson, time is not a homogeneous series of discrete instants but a continuous, heterogeneous flow of conscious experience—an “uninterrupted melody of inner life.” Duration, in his view, is qualitative rather than quantitative, immanent rather than measurable, and cannot be fully represented through linear or mechanistic models. By rejecting sequential temporality in favor of a fragmented yet durational structure, Deleuze's time-image translates Bergson's metaphysical intuition into a cinematic—and by extension, media-artistic—form. It thus enables an aesthetic encounter in which time manifests not as narrative instrument, but as the very substance of experience. This theoretical linkage could be further developed with reference to specific artworks or curatorial frameworks that materialize such conceptual intersections.



*Figure 1 Christian Marclay's The Clock Single-Channel Video Installation, 2010-2011*

In contemporary art and moving-image practices, the logic of the time-image has extended into video art. As Mary Ann Doane observes, modern visual culture increasingly exposes the uncontrollability and instability of time. When images detach from narrative progression and instead foreground duration, stasis, repetition, or delay, time ceases to function as a background dimension and becomes the central medium of the artwork itself. Time-based media art extends cinematic time-image beyond the screen, where temporal perception becomes an immersive and experiential condition unfolding via duration and repetition. The video work *The Clock* by the American artist Christian Marclay is a milestone for the development of time-based art. The 24-hour-long film depicts scenes from thousands of films and TV

programs which describe the time, as gathered by the artist. Each minute in the footage corresponds precisely to the real-life time, allowing the audience to feel confused about the relationship between reality and image. The movie takes several time fragments and puts them together, presenting a stream of consciousness in visual material and stimulating the audience's subjective reflection [5], as shown in Figure 1.

### 3. Time-Based Performance Art

Performance art constitutes a live artistic modality in which the artist's body—together with its actions, gestures, vocalizations, and occasionally integrated objects—functions as the primary medium. Rather than producing a stable object, performance art foregrounds enactment itself, aiming to generate, communicate, or co-create specific experiential, semantic, or ontological states with an audience. As an inherently interdisciplinary practice, it draws from and critically dialogues with theatre, dance, and the visual arts, while simultaneously destabilising their institutional boundaries, representational conventions, and modes of reception. What distinguishes performance art most fundamentally is its insistence on liveness, duration, and the singular, often unreproducible encounter between performer and spectator. Its aesthetic value is grounded not in permanence, but in the immediacy and contingency of the present moment.

Ontologically, performance art is rooted in real-time presentation before a live audience. Within this paradigm, the body operates simultaneously as a medium of expression and as a locus of perception. From a phenomenological perspective, perception is not understood as passive visual reception, but as an embodied and affective negotiation with space, materiality, and sensory intensity. The performing body does not merely occupy space; it unfolds temporally within it. Duration is therefore not an external measurement imposed upon the work, but a qualitatively lived process that is experienced through fatigue, repetition, stillness, or sustained attention. This lived temporality resonates strongly with Gilles Deleuze's conception of the time-image, in which time is no longer subordinated to narrative causality or movement-based progression, but is directly presented through perceptual and sensory states. In performance art, time becomes palpable—felt through suspended action, prolonged gestures, rhythmic repetition, or moments of apparent inactivity in which nothing “happens” except the passage of time itself[6].

Within contemporary performance practice, the body is increasingly understood not as a fixed or coherent entity, but as a mutable interface through which the boundaries between the virtual and the actual, the organic and the technological, are continuously negotiated. This shift reflects a broader rethinking of embodiment under posthuman and technological conditions, where the body functions as a site of mediation rather than origin. The work of Japanese artist Mari Katayama exemplifies this approach. In performances such as *Parted*, Katayama mobilises her own body—which she describes as a “homemade prosthesis”—as both subject and medium. Through the use of real-time motion tracking and projection mapping, digital light and shadow interact dynamically with her physical form and surrounding objects. These technological interventions allow for precise spatial alignment and geometric correction, producing a continuously reconfigured bodily image. Rather than presenting the body as a stable presence, Katayama constructs an unstable, prosthetic self that exists across physical and virtual registers. Time, in this context, is experienced not as linear progression but as continuous modulation, where the body is perpetually re-authored through technological feedback.

If Katayama's practice foregrounds temporal instability through technological mediation, the work of Klaus Rinke offers a contrasting yet complementary investigation of time through elemental materials and durational restraint. Rinke's performances frequently involve the human body, clocks, and water as tools for examining the phenomenology of temporal passage. His artistic strategy often centres on isolating moments of stillness within both animate and inanimate forms, attempting to suspend or arrest movement in order to expose time itself. By fragmenting, selecting, and re-sequencing actions, Rinke transforms each captured moment into a symbolic vessel of time, representing a specific state within an ongoing temporal process. Rather than illustrating chronological development, his work embodies the paradox of time as both continuous and discontinuous, flowing and segmented, as shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2 Klaus Rinke: Time, Space, Body, Transformations*

Central to Rinke's practice are the intertwined notions of continuity and impermanence. Water functions in his work as a sculptural and temporal material; the act of pouring water into a container becomes a performative measurement of duration and a human intervention into natural rhythms. Still objects within his performances are not treated as inert matter, but as carriers of immanent temporal content. They do not merely exist in time; they embody time. Rinke's work proposes a conception of temporality in which all change unfolds within an immutable temporal field. Time itself remains constant, while transformation occurs endlessly within its expanse. In this sense, time appears as a field of events—an invisible but omnipresent structure that holds being and becoming in perceptual tension.

Through these divergent methodologies, contemporary performance art transforms the body, materials, and technological systems into laboratories for experiencing time as a concrete, affective, and constitutive force. Rather than representing time symbolically or narratively, performance art allows time to be encountered directly—as endurance, delay, repetition, or stillness—thus extending Deleuze's time-image from the cinematic screen into the lived, embodied space of performative practice.

#### **4. Time-Based Installation Art**

Installation art enters the domain of time-based practice when its structural logic or experiential core is fundamentally dependent on duration. This temporality has often materialized through kinetic sculptural elements, dynamically changing light, integrated moving images, or interactive systems that evolve in response to viewer presence or ambient data. In such works, time is not merely a passive container but an active, constitutive material. This aligns with Gilles Deleuze's concept of "pure optical and sound situations," where time ceases to be a subordinate vector of narrative or action and instead becomes directly apprehensible through perceptual states.

A pertinent case is the collaborative installation by Alter-Projects and Servaire & Co. Its central element—a scent-emitting metronome shaped as a Möbius strip from curved steel, coupled with an ASMR soundscape by Steve Lastro—explicitly engages duration as both form and content. Drawing inspiration from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the work employs synthetic auditory and olfactory stimuli to construct mediated "audio-visual situations." Its aim is not to represent objects, but to bypass direct representation and generate a perceptual "reality" that accesses the viewer's interiority.

Theoretically, the installation operates through a Proustian-Deleuzian framework. Proust's "involuntary memory" posits that sensory triggers can fracture chronological time, suddenly actualizing a past moment within the present. Deleuze extends this in his theory of the crystal-image, where the present (the actual) and its virtual past coexist and perpetually reflect each other within a single crystalline circuit of time. Here, the metronome's rhythmic emission and the soundscape do not simply symbolize time; they function as a sensory catalyst. They trigger a mental process wherein the perceived "now" and the recalled "then" enter into a reciprocal relation, continuously blurring the boundary between immediate sensation and imaginative recollection.

Consequently, the installation constructs what might be termed a sensory altar—a meditative space designed not for narrative contemplation, but for the direct, non-representational experience of time itself. It guides the audience through a temporal loop: from the perceptual present, into a virtual past evoked by

sensation, and back to a newly reconfigured “actual” moment, now imbued with the resonance of that temporal coalescence. Thus, the work demonstrates how time-based installation art can materialize the crystal-image, using mediated sensory situations to make the paradoxical unity of time an immediate perceptual fact” [7].

## 5. Time-Based New Media Art

New Media Art fundamentally engages with emergent technologies to investigate temporality within digital and computational environments. This encompasses practices such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and algorithmic interactivity, where the artistic experience is inherently durational and processual. Unlike static digital prints, New Media Art possesses an essential temporal dimension; it is constituted by continuous change, governed by code and executed through perpetually running software and hardware systems. Artists such as Marc Lee, who work with real-time processing, virtual reality, and interactive installations, demonstrate how time-based media can critically reflect on contemporary networked culture and digital interaction, embedding temporality within broader socio-cultural narratives of technology and perception.

A demonstrative case is Liu Jiayu’s work, *Streaming Stillness*. Utilizing real topographical data of China, the piece employs a suite of AI models—including StyleGAN, pix2pix, and MIDAS—to analyze, interpret, and reimagine landscape. It synthesizes three-dimensional geographic information with AI-trained aesthetics derived from classical Chinese ink painting, generating a virtual terrain that exists in a state of perpetual, yet almost imperceptible, transformation, as shown in Figure 3.

The work achieves a profound effect of contemplative emptiness and stillness, not by denying change but by situating it within a cyclical, meditative flow. This creates a perceptual paradox: through digitally simulated motion, a transcendent state of calm is manifested. The piece thus operates on several conceptual levels: it interrogates the relationship between emotion and scenery, the virtual and the real, and the mind and its object. By translating “virtual” visual traditions into an algorithmically-driven, time-based experience, it renders time and thought tangible—no longer abstract vectors but sensory, aesthetic phenomena.

Ultimately, by constructing an artificial yet deeply resonant reality, *Streaming Stillness* destabilizes conventional perceptions of the real. It opens an aesthetic and philosophical space where otherwise obscured truths—about landscape, memory, and perception—can be revealed through the very act of durational, technologically-mediated contemplation.



*Figure 3 Jiayu liu, streaming stillness exhibited at the Venice art biennale 2022*

## 6. Conclusion

Through an analysis of artworks that foreground temporality, artists direct viewers' attention to the duration of lived experience, thereby inviting a critical reconsideration of their perception of time and existence. In summary, within contemporary time-based media art, time is understood not as a measurable chronological sequence but as a lived, perceptual condition shaped by sensation, memory, and affect. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze's time-image, this chapter examines practices across moving image, performance, installation, and AI-generated environments to elucidate how contemporary artworks elicit temporal awareness through embodied participation. It demonstrates

how temporal structures are constituted through sonic atmospheres, spatial choreography, bodily interaction, and algorithmic processes. Time-based artists navigate the thresholds between the intangible and the material, the abstract and the tangible, the transcendent and the mundane, thereby making palpable the very limits of temporal experience.

However, this research is cognizant of certain limitations. Firstly, it is recognized that the method employed in this analysis is strongly rooted in qualitative analysis and case studies, which might not necessarily reflect all nuances and diversities with respect to time-based media practices and might lack adequate accounting with regards to reception and perception by different cultures and audiences. Secondly, although in this article, examples of artworks have been presented by categorizing them according to Deleuze's time-image theory, it should be noted that application of this theory is necessarily interpretative and might end up emphasizing some perceptions or phenomenal experiences over others, leading to some kind of marginalization of potentially significant frameworks and contexts altogether. Thirdly, in this article, emphasis is squarely placed on artwork objects as well as their formalistic and temporal dimension, and not systemic, detailed analysis concerning reception, embodied cognition, or affect insights. Finally, there is rapid adoption and integration of new technologies, and these include virtual reality, extended reality, sensor systems in real time, and AI-generated environments.

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