

Gina Buenfeld on *The space consists of a circle that travels in time*

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

T.S.Eliot, Four Quartets

It is a common assumption of science fiction, that if you want to travel in time, you will need a machine. From the DeLorean car in *Back to the Future*, to H.G. Wells' Victorian time machine, the propositions have captured imaginations through generations. Contemporary physics is no less fascinating, describing a reality in which time travel is science fact, as time and distance are refigured as interwoven aspects of a deep and fundamental property of the universe known as space-time, which warps, is distorted, and flows to different rhythms dependant on localised perspective. And we now know that the past is visible whenever we gaze into the sky on a clear night—astronomical processes that took place thousands of years ago appear to us as photons emitted from another era. As Kubler wrote in *The Shape of Time*, "...astronomers and historians have this in common: both are concerned with appearances noted in the present but occurring in the past".

Einstein's theory of General Relativity refuted the Newtonian belief in absolute time and invoked concepts of expansion, contraction, tension and dilation in relation to space-time as it is affected by disturbances. Whilst the arrow of time appears to move in one direction, that of causation and transformation in the material world, Einstein upheld a view that all points on the time axis co-exist and that the past and future are just as real as the present. Writing a decade before Einstein, Henri Bergson, described the world in similar terms. His seminal work, *Matter and Memory*, described virtual aspects of reality that have a *radical alterity*, thought not merely psychologically, but as ontologically autonomous and of a deeply spiritual nature. These unconscious psychical states are fundamentally different in kind to perception of manifest matter—they have their own distinct character that can be accessed with an adjustment in the attitude of consciousness. Through a rigorous method—*Intuition*—Bergson contemplated a body-mind relationship in which spirit was not reduced to matter and memory wasn't localised in the material brain but considered an expanded category of reality. These virtual states were privileged and charged with potentiality: "there is more in the idea of nonbeing than being, of chaos than order, of the possible than the real".

(Deleuze, *Bergsonism* P.17)

For Janne Schäfer and Kristine Agergaard time travel is not a fantasy drawn from the realm of science fiction, but a potentiality of the present moment of which past and future are virtual modalities. Along with the dream and imaginary planes, these virtual modes of the present have a reality that is not actualised in our perception of matter. For J&K time travel is an experimental form of artistic research, in which they mine the histories of physical sites in non-linear and visionary ways, working with the nature of mind and imagination as a vehicle, a technology. Responding to an invitation to reflect on the 50th anniversary of SPACE, the artists led guided meditations for willing time travellers, reaching into the past

and future of early studio sites on London Fields and at St. Katharine Docks. The sessions involved sustained concentration of the mind to open access channels into occluded fields of reality, much like Bergson's method of actualising the virtual past: "*we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual...*" (Ibid)

In waking life, adaptive consciousness subsumes the planes of dream, recollection and imagination into a coherent and practical character of life. Those realms mingle and overlap, shifting between virtual and actual states all the time, registering as distinct tensions and situations of lived time. The experience of déjà vu is one rupture in our relation to the virtual that momentarily reveals the co-existence of temporal attitudes—when we remember the present contemporaneously with itself. By placing the mind in a state of concentrated awareness, through meditation, hypnosis, or with shamanic techniques, that insight can be cultivated such that a dematerialised consciousness can recover fugitive and remote temporal events, bringing them back from oblivion. Drawing on their personal experience with spiritual practices including the Bön Buddhist tradition of Tibet, J&K have developed a disciplined approach to working with the mind. Centuries ago Tibetan yogis began working with the energetic field of body and mind to address the unrealised potential of the dream realm, bringing it into luminous, open awareness as a preparation for the ultimate transference; death. J&K's time travelling sessions similarly extrapolate articulations of the real from the underlying nature of mind by permitting specific modes of being into experience.

The space consists of a circle that travels in time, 2018, is a site-specific installation that renders time travellers' imaginaries as artistic material. Accounts of temporal voyages are recounted by disembodied voices, a spectral presence in the darkened space of the gallery, variously illuminated by *shining points* of material and object assemblages extracted from the spoken testimonies of excursions to other times. Colours, textures, fragrances and fragments of written and spoken word—accreted histories—are configured in totemic arrangements around which symbolic meaning and potential dramas unfold.

A 20-minute looped multi-channel sound composition fills the space with layered voices rising to moments of intensity, and dissolving into ambient sounds filling an acoustic spectrum spanning moving vehicles, a passing train, weather conditions, and the synthesis of abstract effects—white noise, a drone, reverbs and feedback. The acoustic environment situates the listener in a state of pure becoming and as the sounds narrow or enlarge the active participant can contract or expand the content with their imagination, exploring their sensory perceptions and virtual projections. Each visual and auditory fragment is a coordinate or clue that guides the imagination as it populates a space or locates a geography that is privately, uniquely, created, whilst shared with fellow visitors and anchored to the specific site of SPACE, invoking the artists who have worked there and imagining the generations who will do so in the future.

During my own time travel excavation, I met with an apparition of the late Bruce Lacey—caretaker and resident of SPACE studios on Martello Street between 1971-79. His

exhibition at Camden Arts Centre in 2012 was the backdrop against which I met Janne and Kristine. In a programme I curated responding to Lacey's work, J&K staged a durational performance in which the audience participated in a ceremonial meditation on death. Running consistently through their work is a concern with the ritual as artistic format—a practice shared with Lacey who toured the Neolithic sites of the British Isles, performing rites of passage in reverence to the land, heavens and ancestral heritage. Those stone circles are amongst the earliest known astronomical observatories—technologies and art forms created by ancient civilisations to connect human consciousness to the vast universe. For Kubler, “the artist's relationship to time is not about consuming what exists, but creating possible futures—a historical question of their relation to what has preceded and what will follow them” (*The Shape of Time*). J&K's formulation of this project at SPACE demonstrates a similar intention: embodying ancestral wisdom to actively create a future, one that recognises the *radical alterity* of the immaterial; the mind and soul. And perhaps there is some speculative thinking here—that in the western world, so dominated by rational and human-centric thought, there is an urgent call for intuitive encounters, for advocacy of unrehearsed experiences and receptivity to things *on their own terms*.

Bergson and Einstein contributed to an era of profound transformation in our understanding of the world and our being in it. For Bergson, a metaphysics was necessary to give meaning and intuition to the otherwise abstract hypotheses of science, towards a “reconstitution of complete experience” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism*). The elevation of an inner spiritual world in Bergson's metaphysics of time attracted criticism—that it lacked concern for social, political histories. Eliot, writing a few decades later against the backdrop of war contemplated time in relation to historical events and humanity, and between these positions it seems there is a movement that comes full circle, like the measures of duration that structure our lives: the orbit of the earth around the sun; the rotation of the earth on its axis; *a circle that travels in time...*

*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.*
T.S.Eliot, Four Quartets

Gina Buenfeld is Programme Curator, Exhibitions at Camden Arts Centre, London where she has commissioned, produced and curated ambitious exhibitions with internationally acclaimed artists since 2009. Her research interests are concerned with plant ontology in relation to music/sound-based practices as a form of becoming-molecular, enabling contact with and understanding of the energetic properties of non-human entities. On a sabbatical in 2017 she conducted fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon, Finnish Lapland, the Penwith region of Cornwall, and Wicklow in Ireland, learning about the spiritual significance of sound, oral traditions and abstract art in Shamanic and Pagan / pre-Christian practices. Her curatorial and writing practice situates experimental music, abstract art and plants in a configuration that advocates for non-rational, feeling-led encounters with art.