

## Time Beyond Human Reach

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## Time that is not composed of “music”

GRAYCODE and jiiiiin, the artists behind *Time in Ignorance*,  $\Delta T \leq 720$  (alternatively titled “*Time in Ignorance*”), have a shared background as music composition majors. Nonetheless, it is difficult to classify their work in the exhibition space as “music”, not because the sound filling the basement of Project Space SARUBIA is closer to the grammar of conventional contemporary music that has long been freed from the reins of tonality, or because the audio work is displayed alongside a conductor, monitors, and drawings. Rather, it is because of the time that is being “exhibited” there.

Music has long been called the “art of time.” The “time” here, however, has always indicated the concept of temporality in connection to the human being as the agent of perception, which is based on a human-centered notion regarding two major concepts: protention and retention. When a

sound is heard, the listener develops an expectation of another sound to follow, which is called protention, while retention is the state where the sound already heard remains in the listener's consciousness. As protention or retention encounters the sound that follows, a sense of satisfaction or tension is aroused, which is often considered the essence of music. The key aspect of this phenomenon is what is happening within the agent of perception that recognizes and responds to the chain of fragmented sounds. However, *Time in Ignorance* does not present anything that can be perceived in such a way. At the center of the exhibition are sounds (or vibrations) that continuously ring out, but it does not provide any fragmented sounds that could induce protention or retention in listeners. The frequency of the vibrations, which began at 61 Hz with the opening performance at 6PM on May 13, is programmed to decrease gradually by 0.0347222 Hz per hour until it eventually reaches 36 Hz by the end of the exhibition on June 12.

The final frequency, 36 Hz, is the lower limit for the range of sounds that can be generated by the speaker system installed at the exhibition venue. At any lower frequency, the sound, which was already only occasionally perceptible to a few visitors with the keenest senses, would vanish from the human spectrum of hearing itself. The gradual shift is also hardly recognizable in *Drawings for the Mathematical Model of Dynamic System and Chaoplexity (Homage of Rayleigh-Bérnard Convection Cell)*, which are video recordings of the process in which digital drawings were created in real time by transforming the information of sounds into digital data. A UFO-like conductor named *Transducer I* transforms the sound information into vibrations, though these barely perceptible vibrations accompanied by barely audible sounds can hardly belong in the same domain as the "visualization of sounds" often utilized in media installations. The pencil drawing *Quantized Notation*, which shows the change in the

frequency and modulation of the sound piece over the duration of 720 hours as a graph of gentle vertical waves, does not quite resemble a music score but appears closer to the response spectra of a seismometer recording imperceptible quakes. All of this happens throughout the 720 hours, from the very start to the very end of the exhibition. As implied by its title, the exhibition presents the time that exists beyond the boundaries of perception, or the time that passes in our ignorance.

### **Time of viewing and time of the artwork**

*Time in Ignorance* takes place over 720 hours, which does not simply mean that the exhibition is open for 30 days. There is a reason why the duration of the exhibition, from the opening to the closing of the exhibition venue, is described by the number of hours. The 720 hours specified here is the duration for which the artwork is sustained. The change of sounds—vibrations—

and video images that started on May 13 does not stop, even when the curator of the venue leaves work and closes the venue. The 720 hours signify the duration of the work in the most literal sense. This means that the work cannot be perceived or captured as a completed work even by its creators, not to mention the viewers, as the duration of the work inordinately exceeds the allocated (or feasible) time for viewing.

The tension between the time taken for the artwork and the time taken for viewing was first brought to the spotlight in performance art, which became prominent in the late 60s. Unlike traditional performing arts that pursue the representation of a narrative, performance art pursues the sense of presentness and refuses to accept the virtual contraction of time. Durational performances, in particular, are centered around the time that artists physically experience in real time before the viewers. The work that marked the beginning of durational performances is

known as *Five Day Locker Piece*, performed by Chris Burden in 1971, where the artist locked himself in Locker 5 at the University of California for five days. For 1972's *Bed Piece*, Burden stayed in the exhibition space for 22 days, during which the viewers visiting the gallery could see the artist actually "living" there. Similarly, for *The House with the Ocean View* in 2002, Marina Abramović spent 12 days on the stage where her every single movement is completely open to the viewers. In these performances, where the boundary dissolves between the time of the artwork and the time lived by the artists, the duration of the work is beyond the scope of perception or capture by the viewers. The time of the work demands time in the viewers' actual lives. Previously kept outside of the time of everyday life, art penetrates the lives of the viewers.

In that the duration of the work is out of the capturable range by the viewers, *Time in*

*Ignorance* could be seen as having a similar structure as these performances. There is, however, a definitive difference between the two: whether the time of the work is experienced by a human being or not. Even after the viewers stop watching the performance for a moment or return home altogether, the time of a durational performance is still experienced by the performer who still remains. Such experience of the artist is the essence of these performances. The performer "endures" the time in its entirety, whereas the viewers do not as they cannot devote all of their time to the viewing of art. The viewers are moved by the authenticity of the artists and their experiences, from which the message of the work arises. Meanwhile, the 720 hours of *Time in Ignorance* is not experienced by any humans with agency. What is creating the 720-hour-long vibrations is not a human performer but a programmed device. Viewers do not feel empathy or admiration for a computer or machine that generates vibrations for 720 hours. Each viewer

who visits the exhibition during the exhibition period can only partly and barely perceive the vibrations that ring out without human involvement and regardless of whether human beings can recognize it or not. Even “perceiving” such vibrations can hardly be described as “hearing” them. Rather, in the exhibition venue, the viewers’ bodies are closer to physical obstacles which the sound waves that resonate through the venue encounter and reflect in different directions. The viewers become not the subjects of the experience but objects involved in the frequency of the vibrations that fill the exhibition space regardless of whether the viewers can hear them or not.

### **Entropic temporality**

*Time in Ignorance* presents time that can be completely viewed and grasped by neither the artists nor the viewers. This time is separated from the experience of a human subject and thus

dethrones us as subjects and reduces us to objects. Such time is named by the artists as “time out of sight.” The artist duo aim to let the viewers “sense the time out of sight as a real experience.” What significance does their art have in seeking to “sense” as “a real experience” the time that can be neither experienced nor subjectified and yet defines the entire space occupied by the viewers and their body?

The answer to this question calls for a spotlight on an artist who had the exact same approach: artist and critic Robert Smithson (1938-1973). He saw art as adding more entropy to the universe. Entropy is a thermodynamic property that represents a material state and a key concept of the second law of thermodynamics stating that every isolated system inevitably and increasingly loses energy and gains disorder. Order is an energy that emerges against ever-increasing entropy; order disappears due to the increase of entropy and eventually leads to a state of

equilibrium, which has maximum entropy and therefore creates stability. All that exists in this universe is driven to reach a state of equilibrium. Based on this context, Smithson created his works with earth as the main material; he viewed earth as being in a constant state of erosion and collapse, and turning into stable grains and fragments upon undergoing sedimentation. In this regard, Smithson saw earth as a specific case of actuality shifting from non-equilibrium to equilibrium, as a final place where energy that has resisted against gravity lapses into being settled and sedimented, and where every living organisms and material objects—however organized—is restored into particles in a state of equilibrium and gathers together. It can be said that all living organisms and material objects that have a certain form and order are merely in a state of “arrest” in the transition towards the equilibrium in a process that Smithson called the “primary process.”

What is highlighted here is temporality: To view the universe from the perspective of the increase in entropy or transition to the equilibrium is to contemplate the vast timescale of matter that easily surpasses the time and history of humanity. Considering temporality, it might feel absurd to mention a concept such as non-temporal eternity while discussing artwork, which is the mere product of an artist’s idea created into an object. All elements related to art—materials, tools, and the body of the artist used for creating a work of art, and even the physical and chemical reactions triggered inside the artist’s brain—are already involved with the primary process that defines the material world. The earth art of Smithson is the sampling of such primary process, where matter breaks down, flows, dissolves, oxidates, corrodes, and sediments here in the material world.

Interestingly enough, the artists of *Time in Ignorance* also refer to this non-equilibrium-to-equilibrium transition. “[...] *Time in Ignorance*,

$\Delta T \leq 720$  is situated within the process of transitioning from non-equilibrium to equilibrium. The opening performance generates a chaotic form that creates chaoplexity, which is the very first moment of non-equilibrium. The state of non-equilibrium has existed as an absolute condition that drives change in nature to reveal the difference. During the 30-day exhibition, the sound works generate a movement that deviates from the state of non-equilibrium; all the spontaneous changes we experience in the process occur in an irreversible state.”

While Smithson created *Spiral Jetty* (1970) by pouring 6,000 tons of rocks and earth into a lake to conduct the sampling of the primal process of matter where the piece was submerged, poured down, and eroded to shift towards equilibrium, *Time in Ignorance* compresses this shift that will be repeated for the next billions of years into 720 hours, simulating it with sound—vibrations—and digital video images. Here, art is not the sensuous

representation of human emotions or ideas, but rather a prism through which the world and all the things in it are viewed from the perspective of post-human, cosmic temporality that cannot be experienced or represented by a human being. According to Smithson, “When a thing is seen through the consciousness of temporality, it is changed into something that is nothing. This all-engulfing sense provides the mental ground for the object, so that it ceases being a mere object and becomes art. The object gets to be less and less but exists as something clearer. Every object, if it is art, is charged with the rush of time even though it is static [...]”

*Time in Ignorance* calls attention to the time that cannot be restored to human experience, the time charged within all human- and non-human objects, the time that rushes by with no regard for whether a human being can perceive it or not. We, as humans, have reached the realization that human history is simply a tiny dot in the four

billion years of the Earth's history, and has only just started to leave its mark on parts of the planet's surface as well as its deeper geological layers. The neologism "anthropocene" refers to the time dating from the commencement of significant human impact on the Earth, which indicates that human history is closely involved with that of the Earth itself. The time spent by human beings to move, produce, waste, and dispose while emitting carbon dioxide, the time that we have regarded as being provided infinitely for us and us alone, has begun to be interlinked with the time and life of the planet itself. This time of the Earth passes in tandem with the present time, as we start our cars, fly on a plane for a vacation, lose countless lives, and conduct meetings and exhibitions online due to the worldwide COVID-19 epidemic. The 720 hours of *Time in Ignorance* is the result of sampling this time of the Earth. We do not have any idea yet as to how the universe will reach equilibrium.

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