

Kairos Time: The Performativity of Timing and Timeliness ... or; Between Biding One's Time and Knowing When to Act

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Abstract

This paper investigates contemporary performance and artistic practice through the prism of *kairos*, a concept that in spite of the 'temporal turn' within the arts and humanities — and its familiarity within literary and rhetorical studies — has remained relatively under-interrogated in relation to artistic making and thinking. *Kairos* is an Ancient Greek term meaning a fleeting opportunity that needs to be grasped before it passes: not an abstract measure of time passing (*chronos*) but of time ready to be seized, an expression of timeliness, a critical juncture or 'right time' where something could happen. *Kairos* has origins in two different sources as Eric Charles White notes: *archery* — “an opening ... through which the archer's arrow has to pass”, and *weaving* — the “‘critical time’ when the weaver must draw the yarn through a gap that momentarily opens in the warp” (1987, p.13). The Ancient Greek art of *technē* (referring to a 'productive' or 'tactical' knowledge, rather than craft) is underpinned by the principles of *kairos* (opportune timing) and *mētis* (cunning intelligence). Alternatively, for philosopher Antonio Negri, *kairòs* refers to the 'restless' instant where naming and the thing named attain existence (in time), for which he draws example from the way that the poet “vacillating, fixes the verse” (2003, p.153.) Drawing Negri's writing on the 'revolutionary time' of *kairos* into dialogue with Ancient Greek rhetoric, this paper elaborates the significance of *kairos* to contemporary art practice and critical imagination, identifying various artistic practices that operate as contemporary manifestations of Ancient *technē*, or analogously to Negri's 'poet': practices alert or attentive to the live circumstances or 'occasionality' of their own making, based on *kairotic* principles of immanence, intervention and invention-in-the-middle.

KEYWORDS: *kairos*, timeliness, *technē*, *mētis*, opportunity, drawing, live coding, falling

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Charting an escape route from expectation requires slowing down or stalling the rhythm of habitual routine at the same time as building capacity to respond with unexpected speed and intensity when the time is right. Improvisation is defence against melodious repetition, wilful interruption of predictable flows. To improvise is to conceive a counter rhythm (of being or behaving), by devising ways to resonate discordantly or at a different timbre. Working against the grain demands a degree of attentiveness, identification of alternative frequencies of opportunity, the minding of gaps. Spaces of possibility — yet too often the gaps remain unnoticed, or else are filled carelessly as incessant chatter surfaces the holes of awkward silence. Find ways of extending the spaces of hesitancy between cause and effect, yet act swiftly for kairos is fleeting, disappears as quickly as it comes. Act swiftly but with intent, for whilst the opportunist recognizes the opening within every situation, in haste true kairos goes to waste. (Cocker, 2010)

This paper approaches contemporary performance and artistic practice through the prism of *kairos*, a concept that in spite of the ‘temporal turn’ within the arts and humanities — and its familiarity within literary and rhetorical studies — has remained relatively under-interrogated in relation to artistic processes of making and thinking.¹ The first indication towards *kairos* from my own archive is a text-work (a version of which is cited above) produced within the context of my collaboration with *Open City* (2007 — 2010), a performance collective whose practice engages in observing and intervening in the social dynamics within public space, through various kinds of participatory events including acts of stillness, slow walks, repetitions, inversions and other deviations from the normative patterns of public behaviour.² Conceived as one of a series of public postcards accompanying the performance activities of *Open City*, contained therein a reflection on the dual principles of *kairos* — the seemingly contradictory double manoeuvre of a certain slowness or hesitancy practiced alongside swiftness or speed; of receptivity with assertion; rupture with affirmation, a capacity for knocking back certain normative or structural forces and pressures whilst ushering in the potential of something new, something unexpected, something *otherwise*.

This paper proceeds through a series of encounters with art practices through which I reflect on the *kairotic* performativity of timing and timeliness alongside its associated modes of attention, intelligence and creative potentiality. My intent is to honour the evolution of my own emergent thinking around *kairos*, with content drawn from different contexts where my role has ranged from that of a writer-interlocutor observing and reflecting on other’s art practice, to artistic collaborations where the exposition arises from the embedded perspective of art practice itself. So too, might the mode of writing shift between critical or contextual analysis and fragments of creative prose, the key mode of thinking-in-and-through-writing within my own practice as a writer-artist. Yet, before reflecting on how the dual *kairotic* principles of biding one’s time and knowing when to act might operate within various contemporary artistic practices, some initial historical contextualization of the term *kairos* is required. Drawing specifically on the Ancient Greek rhetorical conceptualization, the term *kairos* is often taken to mean ‘timing’ or the ‘right time’, a ‘decisive’ critical moment whose fleeting opportunity must be grasped before it passes. According to Eric Charles White, *kairos* has origins in two different sources: *archery*, where it describes “an opening or ‘opportunity’ or, more precisely, a long tunnel like aperture through which the archer’s arrow has to pass”, and *weaving* where there is “a ‘critical time’ when the weaver must draw the yarn through a gap that momentarily opens in the warp of the cloth being woven” (1987, p.13). Putting these two definitions together, White argues that, “one might understand kairos to refer to a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved” (1987, p.13).

Etymologically related to the Greek word *keirein* — to cut — *kairos* can be conceived as both a temporal ‘opening’ or critical moment (a ‘nick’ in time) *and*, in White’s terms, a ‘will-to-invent’ capable of responding to this opening: “Kairos thus establishes the living present as point of

departure or inspiration for a purely circumstantial activity of invention” (White, 1987, p.13).³ Indeed, *kairos* describes a qualitatively different mode of time to that of linear or chronological time: it is not an abstract measure of time passing but of time ready to be seized, an expression of timeliness, a critical juncture where something *could* happen. Reflecting on the significance of *kairos* within the ‘bodily arts’ of Ancient Greek athletics and rhetoric, Debra Hawhee states, “*kairos* marks the quality of time rather than its quantity, which is captured by the other, more familiar Greek word for time — *chronos*. In short, *chronos* measures duration whilst *kairos* marks force” (Hawhee, 2004, p.66). John E Smith differentiates between *chronos*, “the fundamental conception of time as measure, as quantity of duration, the length of periodicity”, and *kairos*, which points to “the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen just at ‘any time’, but only *that* time, to a time that marks an opportunity what may not recur” (Smith, 2002, p.47). Elaborating upon Smith’s distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*, Amélie Frost Benedikt, argues that whilst ‘*chronos*-time’ is conceived as “absolute, universal, and objective, *kairos* is interpretative, situational and thus, ‘subjective’” (2002, p.226).

However, my intent is not to offer a historical survey of the term, for indeed, as Thomas Rickert argues, “the meaning of the Greek word *kairos* is itself murky because of its various usages”; its definition shifting, contradictory and therefore lacking direct or exact translation (2013, p.75).⁴ Moreover, its various accentual forms — *kairos*, *kaĩros*, *kairós* — give rise to a play of meanings as Debra Hawhee notes, from “*kairos* as opening, as weaving, as timing, and most notably, as critical, delimited places on the body” (2004, p.67). Whilst *kairos* has been used to refer to the notion of ‘due measure’, propriety and decorum, my own interest is wilfully partial, oriented towards what Hawhee has described as an “embodied, mobile, nonrational version of rhetorical *kairos*” (2004, pp.68 — 9). I draw on Carolyn R. Miller’s conceptualization of *kairos* as “the uniquely timely, the spontaneous, the radically particular” (2002, p.xiii). Miller indicates towards a sense of *kairos* that “encourages us to be creative in response to the unforeseen [...] The challenge is to invent, within a set of unfolding and unprecedented circumstances, an action (rhetorical or otherwise) that will be understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances” (2002, p.xiii). A form of invention in response to the ever-unfolding and contingent conditions of the living present, moreover, a form of invention whose success will only be verifiable in retrospect not only describes rhetorical practice, but can also be applied to artistic invention.

An improvisatory tendency can indeed be encountered within various examples of live performance, however, my research interest also focuses towards the *kairotic* mode of invention and intervention at the level of the practicing-within-practice: the unfolding decision-making, the thinking-in-action, the navigation of competing forces, the activity of working with and through obstacles or of ‘figuring’ something out. Whilst the historical practices associated with *kairos* include the bodily arts of athletics and rhetoric, as well as weaving and archery, my own enquiry began through an examination of the *kairotic* potential of the restless line *drawing*. The mode of drawing addressed is not based on any singular practice as such, rather I propose towards a speculative quality of attention and articulation that certain kinds of drawing — even *hyperdrawing* — might be deemed capable, drawing out the different facets of *kairos* operative therein. What follows then is a meditation on the restless line drawing, the *kairos* of a self-constitutional line intent on observing and documenting the conditions of its own coming into being.⁵ Whilst drawing is often conceived as an activity that is drawn — as an echo of that which it attempts to describe — there is arguably another kind of drawing which does not follow, but is initiated instead in the hope of making manifest that which could not have been conceived of at the out-set nor planned for in advance. This drawing no longer draws on — by making a demand on — the observable world nor on the powers of the imaginary, but simply attempts to bring forth, make appear. In withdrawing from the pressures of representing something else, this drawing attempts to contemplate the terms of its own coming into being, performed as the reflexive loop of drawing *drawing itself* drawing.

No longer concerned with giving material representation to what has been already

conceptualized or is known to exist, the (oblique) aim of such a practice might be to produce the germinal conditions wherein something unexpected or unanticipated might arise. Indeed, to be open to the unexpected might involve doing and being *less*, becoming creatively passive, a touch purposeless or empty at times; stripping things away or paring them back in order to make manifest a gap or space. An action is begun before knowing what it might enable. A line is scored in order to conceive of the negative space, where what is not known is invited or invoked rather than reached towards or grasped. Refusing to be prepared for in advance, drawing resists the pressures of premeditation to become meditative, where it is activated as a live and reflexive thinking process taking place only in the present moment. It could be tempting to view this form of unfolding drawing as one that somehow takes care of itself, which once set in motion is capable of sustaining a trajectory by its own momentum. Not so, for the act of drawing is not to be undertaken passively nor without due care, but rather requires continual attention, a certain discipline. To begin a drawing in the absence of the knowledge of what it will become, does not involve the artist giving over all responsibility, relinquishing agency or intentionality in the production of the work. Instead, the artist must consciously adopt a medial position, where they become responsible for actively maintaining the conditions that will keep the drawing process mobile, dynamic. Here, the artist neither pushes nor pulls the direction of the line, but instead attempts to create the framework wherein the drawing might remain open to the potentiality of different and competing forces.

For Debra Hawhee, the subject's "response to the forces at work in a particular encounter" can be conceptualized as the medial position of 'invention-in-the-middle', a *kairotic* movement involving a process of "simultaneous extending outwards and folding back", a "space-time that marks the emergence of a pro-visual 'subject', one that works *on* and is working on *by* — the situation" (2002, p.18). Within this practice of drawing, different pressures and commitments compete for attention as one force gives way to allow the emergence of another, as the rule created in order for something to begin is superseded by another that allows it to continue to develop. The impetus or force that initiates a process has the capacity to destroy it also; production can become entropic in the absence of the decision that determines when to stop or change tack. The artist's role then is to navigate a course of action between these different and competing forces of production, by intuiting when to yield and when to reassert control. Like the helmsman sailing a course through the contingencies of the water and the wind, the artist must become attuned to the pressures of contradictory forces, skilful in the art of holding back (the familiar or repeated) whilst ushering in (the unforeseen, the still unknown). Indeed, it is not the chance wind that sails the boat, but the helmsman's capacity for knowing how to work (*with*) it, for exploiting the possibilities immanent therein.

Herein, emerges a contingent form of working knowledge, which is not based on knowing how to deal with a situation in advance, where the future is predicted and prepared for. Instead, it is a form of knowledge borne of the moment, from having confidence. In these terms, confidence is the knowledge that the right decision will be made when required; it involves trusting (*tôi kairōi* — "to trust the moment") that a response will be performed appropriately and with skill at the propitious time (Hawhee, 2002, p.18). The *kairotic* performativity of timing and timeliness, the act of biding one's time and knowing when to act produces — or even is *produced* in-and-through — a tactical kind of *knowing*. Indeed, *kairos* is the mode of temporality associated with *technē*. Here, *technē* is not used in its habitual sense where it is taken to mean the skilful art of craftsmanship, of making and doing, but rather is re-conceived as a disruptive, even subversive species of productive knowledge (Atwill, 1998). Tracing its origins within Ancient Greek culture, Janet Atwill notes how *technē* refers to a particular mode of 'knowing' or *art* capable of responding to situations that are contingent, shifting or unpredictable, in order to affect a change of balance or power by steering the direction of events through wily — even somewhat deviant — means rather than through force. According to Atwill, *technē* often emerges at the point "when a boundary or limitation is recognized, and it creates a path that both transgresses and redefines that boundary" (1998, p.48). She asserts that the aim of *technē* is to "transform the 'what is' into 'what is possible'" (1998, p.70). Moreover, it is not a form of knowledge intent on stabilizing or limiting the contingency of unstable, indeterminate forces

(nor resisting their pressures), but rather in the transformation of their force towards opportunity. As Atwill suggests, “Because *technē* defined itself in terms of intervention and invention, it is concerned solely with situations that yield indeterminacies that would allow one to discern the opportune moment and to ‘seize the advantage’” (1998, p.70). *Techné* thus involves a practice of attention, which — against the reactions of impulsive habit — holds back, bides its time. It is the art of *knowing-when*, of attempting to catch the limit off-guard.

A *kairotic* art involves the gesture of developing readiness (for anything), a state of being at the cusp of action, mind and body poised. It is also an act of scarifying the ground, an attempt to create the germinal conditions within which something unanticipated might arise, a field of desirable indeterminacy within which to work. If *kairos* is the Ancient Greek term given to the mode of temporality associated with *technē*, then *mētis* refers to a specific species of cunning or wily intelligence capable of truly harnessing the opportunities that *kairos* affords. For Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *mētis* is the art of preparing for what could not have been anticipated or planned for in advance; it is “swift, as prompt as the opportunity that it must seize on the wing, not allowing it to pass” (Detienne and Vernant, 1991, p.15). They argue that *mētis* describes,

A type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing [...] It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic (Detienne and Vernant, 1991, pp.3 — 4).

According to Detienne and Vernant, *mētis* is a form of intelligence or judgment supple enough to work within unstable and shifting conditions, capable of seizing the opportunities (*kairos*) made momentarily visible as the prevailing logic within a given structure or system yields. It is an art like that of catching the wind or the turn of the tide. Although there are other ways of approaching the temporal concept of *kairos*, to do so through the prism of Ancient Greek (particularly sophist) rhetoric seems specifically resonant in relation to contemporary artistic practice, since it brings with it an associated mode of cunning intelligence (*mētis*), moreover, *kairos* and *mētis* together provide the twin principles of a subversive and tactical species of knowledge (*technē*).⁶

In this sense, there is an epistemological significance to *kairos*, which is not about placing faith in a form of tacit knowledge, if this describes an already embodied *know-how* developed intuitively through repeated practice, ingrained into the body through past experience. Instead, what is activated is a *known-not* knowledge (closer perhaps to Sarat Maharaj’s articulation of *no-how*); a form of knowledge capable of working within situations that remain indeterminate or are newly encountered, not already known (Maharaj, 2009).⁷ Or rather it is a knowledge activated simultaneous to the situation that it attempts to comprehend and that alone is adequate to the task of comprehending that situation. This can be seen in the practice of a drawing that attends to nothing more than what is *present*, giving form only to that which emerges synchronous to the very act of its own coming into being. Here, the act of drawing makes visible the event of negotiating the terms of its own emergence: drawing arises simultaneously to what it attempts to draw, where what is drawn could not have existed prior to the event of the drawing. More than simply the meditative making and seizing of opportunity, I consider the *kairotic* practice of drawing as a form of immanent invention performed as a means of articulation emerging simultaneous to (unique and in complete fidelity to) the emergent ontology that it attempts to describe. *Kairos* describes the radical temporality of the very moment of something new coming into being, unique to that very moment.

For philosopher, Antonio Negri, *kairòs* is the event of creating an adequate epistemology simultaneously to the knowledge/being it attempts to describe. He designates the term *kairòs* to the ‘restless’ instant where naming and the thing named attain existence (in time), for which he draws example from the way that the poet “vacillating, fixes the verse” (Negri, 2003, p.153). Concerned only with the present time of its unfolding existence and the future-possible moment of an encounter with something unknown, drawing — akin to the poet’s verse —

might too become restless. However, this restless — even improvisatory — line should not be confused with the unfettered meanderings of a nomadic line moving ever forward nor a form of automatic drawing intent on accessing the hidden recesses of the subconscious imaginary, channelling the secrets of some mystical beyond. The unknown or unexpected it seeks to access does not belong to some *other* place, a distant elsewhere or *outside*, but rather is always immanent, produced *by* the event of the drawing itself, at the site of and through the process of drawing. For Negri, “*kairòs* is the modality of time through which being opens itself, attracted by the void at the limit of time, and it thus decides to fill that void” (2003, p.152.) He describes *kairòs* as “being’s act of leaning out over the void of time *to-come*, i.e. the adventure beyond the edge of time” (Negri, 2003, p.152). Negri conceives the limit experience of *kairòs* as one of “being on the brink”, as ‘being on a razor’s edge’”, a point of rupture and of necessary decision (2003, p.152). *Kairòs* thus describes a mode of immanent (and imminent) invention taking place at the limit of being, at the restless edge of an unfolding eternal.⁸ For Negri “*kairòs* is an exemplary temporal point, because Being is opening up in time; and at each instant that it opens up it must be invented — it must invent itself. *Kairòs* is just this: the moment when the arrow of Being is shot, the moment of opening, the invention of Being on the edge of time” (2004, p.104).

Kairos requires a ‘stepping off’ or away from what is known or certain, an unhinging from the ‘as is’ of the present by leaning into the void of the ‘to come’, at the same time as suspending the desire to fix or firm up the ‘what now, what next’ too hastily, based on the experience of what is *already* known. The future that *kairos* ushers in is less the ‘not yet’ of the future conceived as a *continuation* of the present, but instead that of a radical discontinuity. For Simon O’Sullivan, Negri’s *kairòs* can be pictured, “as an oblique line — a ‘disjunctive synthesis’ to use Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology — away from the present (but, not, as it were, to an already determined future)” (2012, p.119). Within this model, as O’Sullivan asserts, “language is creative and future orientated, an exploratory probe of sorts ... The name is then a leap into the *to-come*” (2012, p.122). Elaborating the rhetorical dimension of *kairos*, John Poulakos notes that the *kairotic* art of “speech exists in time and is uttered both as a spontaneous formulation of and a barely constituted response to a new situation unfolding in the immediate present” (1995, p.61). Within my own enquiry, the research project *Live Notation: Transforming Matters of Performance* (2012) led by principle investigators Hester Reeve and Alex McLean, provided a context (in my role as critical interlocutor) for further elaborating my own conceptualization of *kairotic practice* (Cocker, 2013), specifically in relation to the possibilities of live coding (performing with programming languages) and live art (performing with the body language of action).⁹ Reeve and McLean had already conceived the term ‘live notation’ and the principle of live-ness as a means of shared resonance, asserting that, “live notation is an intrinsic part of live work — for both body and code. In this we consider notation as not being something that precedes, defines or is created by a performance, but as activity that resonates within a performance” (2012).

Reeve and McLean use the term ‘live-ness’ to refer to the durational, embodied, non-repeatable moment of performance, however, the live-ness of live notation is not simply to do with the performance of notation live, but rather, a *kairotic* species of live-ness where the form of articulation is produced as a live event simultaneous (and in fidelity) to the experience that it attempts to articulate. Live notation is a practice alert to the live circumstances of its own making, a *kairotic* practice capable of creating the conditions *for* whilst simultaneously documenting the unfolding *of* its emergence. For White, “kairos stands for a radical principle of occasionality which implies a conception of the production of meaning in language as a process of continuous adjustment to and creation of the present occasion” (1987, p.14). He argues that *kairos* involves a ‘will-to-invent’ that necessitates “adaption to an always mutating situation. Understood as a principle of invention ... *kairos* counsels thought to act always, as it were, on the spur of the moment” (White, 1987, p.13). Underpinned by the principle of performing its thinking through the imperative ‘show us your screens’, live coding involves ‘making visible’ the ‘occasionality’ of its own unfolding through the public sharing of live decision-making within improvisatory performance practice. In live coding, the writing of code is undertaken

live as a means for making improvisational sound or visuals, with the code itself often visibly projected in front of an audience. Here, audiences encounter projected code as a running command line as it is being modified and rewritten by the programmer, real-time feedback affording the performer-programmer the possibility of amending the code synchronous to its execution.

Rather than ‘users’ of existing software products (whose source code remains hidden or undisclosed), for live coders the production of the program is often an intrinsic part of practice. Live coding focuses on the real-time production of the program for code writing simultaneous to its use. As Nick Collins *et al* note, live coders, “work with programming languages, building their own custom software, tweaking or writing the programs themselves as they perform” (2003, p.1). Code is written as it is performed ‘on the spur of the moment’; a practice often referred to as ‘coding on the fly’ or ‘just-in-time coding’ (or what I would propositionally name ‘kairotic coding’). Live coding requires an improvisatory tendency located at a threshold (the gap or ‘creative interval’) between the ‘now’ of the present and the ‘to-come’ of a future-present, the live point of ‘seizure’ or decision-making wherein an unfolding future emerges simultaneously to its imagining. Indeed, a *kairotic* practice involves the art of brinkmanship, the capacity for pushing both self and situation beyond habitual limits, for tolerating the vertiginous experience of the limit’s edge. Improvisation involves the cultivation of a contingent form of present-activated future-oriented imagination intent on courting rather than thwarting the unexpected. Within live notation practices, the pulse of a body in space or of a cursor on screen is conceptualized as the brink of being operative within the live situation of writing, the location of decision-making within live notation and its attendant performance. Live coding can also be conceived as the performing of ‘thinking in action’, a live and embodied navigation of various critical thresholds, affordances and restraints, where its thinking-knowing cannot be easily transmitted nor is it strictly a latent knowledge or ‘know how’ activated through action. Live coding is arguably performed *in actu*, where in Alan Pottage’s terms, its power “exists only en acte, or in actu, (which) is to say ... that is ‘is’ only in the process of its exercise” (1998, p.22). It is closer perhaps to the “immanent intensification” of thinking which philosopher Alain Badiou (following Nietzsche) asserts “is not effectuated anywhere else than where it is given — thought is effective in situ, it is what ... is intensified upon itself, or again, it is the movement of its own intensity” (Badiou, 2005, pp.58 — 9).

Thus far, certain characteristics or properties might be discerned in the relation of *kairos* to creative practice: for example, the performativity of timing and timeliness seemingly relies on the *dual principles* of slowness and speed, of biding one’s time and of knowing when to act. Paradoxically perhaps, the opportunity within the ‘opening’ of *kairos* (ready to be seized) might only be discerned through a slowing down of habitual flows and rhythms, thereby producing the necessary quality of ‘attention’. Referring to the work of Henri Bergson, Simon O’Sullivan argues that ‘attention’ involves “the suspension of normal motor activity which in itself allows other ‘planes’ of reality to become perceivable (this is an opening up to the world beyond utilitarian interests). The event then emerges from the world but from a world usually imperceptible” (2006, p.45). Moreover, as O’Sullivan states, it is this “‘affective-gap’, or ‘hesitancy’ as Henri Bergson understood it, between stimulus and response, which in itself allows creativity to arise” (2006, p.37). Here perhaps, Bergson’s ‘affective-gap’ could be conceived in analogous terms to Negri’s articulation of *kairòs*: a temporal opening or interval that gives rise to a new line of flight. Elsewhere, O’Sullivan makes the connection between Negri’s *kairòs* — “this ‘edge’ ... where invention and innovation take place” (2006, p.191) — and Brian Massumi’s conceptualization of the ‘seeping edge’ between the actual and the virtual, “between the existing state of affairs and a world ‘yet-to-come’” (2006, p.105). Here, not only does the force of *kairos* break through the illusory continuity of *chronos*, but also produces a void or seeping ‘edge’ into which new invention is *called*: *kairos* thus involves the dual principles of rupture and affirmation.

Drawing Negri’s writing on the ‘revolutionary time’ of *kairos* into dialogue with Ancient Greek rhetoric, my own research focuses towards artistic practices that could be conceived to operate

as contemporary manifestations of Ancient *technē* or analogously to Negri's 'poet': practices alert or attentive to the live circumstances or 'occasionality' of their own constitution, based on *kairotic* principles of immanence, intervention and invention, or perhaps even self-locating along the 'seeping edge' between the actual and the virtual. Admittedly, within my own enquiry these concerns are primarily comprehended affectively through the prism of artistic encounter, grasped somewhat intuitively through their resonance or reverberation in relation to practice. For example, my encounter with the work of artist Victoria Kent Gray provoked further elaboration on the experimental temporalities within artistic practice thus, the following extract drawn from our collaborative artists' publication, *Manual* (2014).

Experimental practices require time, resistant to being rushed or ushered quickly towards some goal or destination. Changing the speed of one's action can change the experience of time itself. Slowness and stillness have the capacity to stretch and elongate duration. Slowing one's habitual responses extends the space of hesitancy, liberating attention from the deliberate (directly purposeful) towards deliberation (weighing up). Before a decision is made to act there is an interval of time where the future trembles, hovering in the balance. Pendēre — suspend, pending, impending. Threshold between the as is of the present and the not yet of the still-to-come, the interval is a point of reflection from which things might be steered differently, else remain unchanged. Paradoxically, through experimentation, time can be revealed as continuous (indivisible flux that refuses to be spatialised into minutes and seconds), whilst at the same time as discontinuous (comprising an infinite number of intervals whose fleeting potential is either to be seized or lost). Strange conjunctions materialize: the timely instants of invention within duration; discontinuity within continuity; the infinite within the finite, quick of the slow. To encounter time stripped of its familiar beat and meter can be disconcerting to say the least. Dislodged from the tenses of past and future, time is experienced simultaneously as now and forever, inconstant and eternal; or else perhaps, forever now, eternally inconstant (Cocker, 2014).

My full text unfolds as a set of proposals or even thought-fragments imagined in relation to *Berthing Bone* (2014) (Figure.1), a video work by Gray comprising "a durational series of performed sculptures for the hands", where as Gray states, "through corporeal and moving-image based strategies of stillness, slowness and close proximity, the work explores incipient action, honing a micro-attention to the affective experience of movement before movement takes form (Manning, 2009)".¹⁰ Here, it becomes possible to observe that not only do certain temporal modalities give rise to creativity, but that certain creative modalities can also give rise to different temporalities: the relation is reciprocal. Moreover, there are certain artistic practices that can be conceived as forms of exercise, training or even *askesis* through which to *practice* a kind of sensitization or habituation to other temporalities than *chronos*. Drawing on my encounter with Gray's oeuvre I note how:

An experimental practice locates itself on the trembling edge as time unfolds, uncertain. No longer scripted in advance, here, every next action has to be called or conjured, summoned into play. The temptation might be to fall back onto a repertoire of familiar forms and practiced rhythms. The body wavers at the cusp of action, stalls from making too swift a move. Instead, remains expectant, anticipatory. Hopeful. Intrepid. Not without some unease. For, it takes some nerve to lean into the unknown, to be open or vulnerable to what lies therein. So, test the nerves. Exercise this most fragile of the faculties, for unattended nerve is easily lost. Lean then, into the void; remember — we don't know what a body can do (Cocker, 2014).¹¹

Undoubtedly, the *kairotic* event of leaning into the vertiginous void of the *to-come* takes some nerve, a practiced *diagonality* and commitment made to working against impulse. Indeed, impulse is an illusory sense of liberation, nothing but the involuntary performance of an action or reaction already known, the subconscious repetition of what already is. The challenge then is one of leaning *towards* rather than away from the void "at the edge of time" (Negri, 2013), moreover, to resist 'filling' that void too hastily with "a repertoire of familiar forms and practiced rhythms" (Cocker, 2014).

The Italic I is a practice-based collaboration with artist Clare Thornton that explores the different states of potential made possible through a practiced diagonality and a willingness to surrender to the event of a repeated fall (Figure 2). Our intent is towards addressing the capacities and qualities produced through the event of elective falling, a conceptualization of the fall as a site for generating unexpected forms of embodied knowledge and augmented subjectivity (Cocker & Thornton, 2014, 2015, 2017). Whilst falling requires some loss of power and control, with practice the passivity and apparent weakness often associated therein can be converted into a potential means of strength. However, the aim is not to become desensitized to the experience of a fall, if this means becoming resistant or immune to its charge. Rather, we recognize the benefits of periodic imbalance, the dynamic potential of the diagonal as deviation from the regime of verticality, alternative to the privileging of uprightness. The resolve required for repeatedly falling is of a commitment made to working against impulse; indeed, falling involves the dynamic of leaning into or even surrendering to the unknown. *The Italic I* — *I* tilted diagonally in the gesture of fall, a leaning or inclination towards the unknown (through artistic investigation), towards the other (through collaboration).

Elective falling can be conceived an experimental practice that gives rise to a different temporal experience, akin to that of the faint or swoon: “Suddenly time falters. First, the head spins, overcome with a slight vertigo ... the earth gives way and disappears, one sinks back, goes away ... (but) *where* does one go?” (Clément, 1994, p.1). Beginning with this image of the fainting subject, in *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* Catherine Clément asserts a critical value for syncope, which she describes as a “cerebral eclipse” (1994, p.1). Verena Andermatt Conley elaborates how this “eclipse” might be considered akin to a momentary “interval, absence, followed by a new departure” (1994, p.ix). Conley argues how within her ‘philosophy of rapture’, Clément “militates for a syncope that ‘opens onto a universe of weakness and tricks’ and that ‘leads to new rebellions’ ... She advocated power through impoverishment (*déponillement*) and an art that introduces a break, a disharmony” (Conley, 1994, p.xiv). The figure of the *renonçant* — the ‘renouncing’ subject who leaves the village for the forest — is a key motif within Clément’s philosophy. Drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, she argued that whilst the ‘village’ constitutes a “static and inalterable ... society”, the ‘forest’ is an “open society, transformed by the vital impetus, obeying nothing, distracted by newness ... On one side, time; on the other rupture” (Clément, 1994, p.173).

In similar terms, one might conceive the relation between *chronos* and *kairos*, with *kairos* a kind of temporal syncope, a break in *chronos* or critical interval where “suddenly time falters”. Clément asserts that the *renonçant*’s decision to practice a ‘fall’ from what is known and stable is undertaken consciously towards affecting a change in perception, position or orientation. So too, might the subject return from the voluntary fall, critically changed by the knowledge gleaned therein. Syncope — *sun* (with) and *kopto* (cut) — is borne of discontinuity, a missing beat or break in rhythm, the swoon experienced by leaning into the void ‘to-come’. For Clément, “Vertigo looms, on the way to syncope. No longer the disordered vertigo of the first discomfort, not the ground falling away. It is a voluntary vertigo, radiating control” (1994, p.2). Here, the renunciation of ‘what is’ involves a fall entered into electively, wherein to conjure a new dissonant rhythm already immanent, already ascending to fill the void. Indeed, according to Clément, “syncope begins on a weak beat and carries over onto a strong beat ... The first beat is that of hesitation, the second that of the dissonance that is born as if by surprise ... queen of rhythm, syncope is also the mother of dissonance, it is the source in short of a harmonious and productive discord” (1994, p.5). However, the syncopated dissonance of ‘voluntary vertigo’ requires practice, as we state in *The Italic I*:

There is much work to do not to respond habitually. It will take a while to acclimatize. The studio can be a space for building this resilience. Drive of the intuitive, to disobey the habit that would have us upright, to trip this tendency up. Renunciare — put aside, hold back, resist. Voluntary vertigo: ilinx, inclination. Head strong, head long, edging or a leaning into willfully, to deviate from the

strictly horizontal or vertical. Predisposition. Disposition. An attitude. Étude. Incline — to dip or slope downward, to scoop. Tendency towards. Bent. Descent. (Cocker and Thornton, 2014)

Within *The Italic I*, the studio-gymnasium becomes a site for practicing falling, apprehended as a form of training for nurturing a wilfully non-corrective tendency, the potential of a radically resistant ‘second nature’. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, whilst *kairos* (like the event of a fall) arises unannounced — and therefore one’s response cannot strictly be planned for in advance — it is still arguably possible to prepare oneself for its advent. For Hawhee, the art of ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing when’ central to *kairos*, “is difficult to gauge, let alone teach, and it must be achieved through practice” (2004, p.70). However, she argues that it is still possible to become sensitized to the potential of *kairos* through the cultivation of ‘immanent awareness’ or a quality of attention that includes “different modes of thinking aside from the noetic, diagnostic, rational” (Hawhee, 2004, p.70.) Reflecting on the ‘bodily arts’ or ‘arts of *hexis*’ within Ancient Greek culture, Hawhee uses the term *phusiopoiesis* to describe the ‘arts of training’ and preparation aimed towards the ‘production of one’s own nature’, where “(T)he nature (*phusis*) of the body... can be rendered malleable, made (*poiei*) into something else” (2004, p.12). Training often focused, she asserts, on the cultivation of *mêtis* (‘an intelligence of the body’) and *kairos* (as an “immanent, rhythmic, embodied practice”). Through the ‘habit’ of these trainings — by becoming sensitized or habituated through the practice of *askesis* — a quality of *kairotic* awareness might be cultivated. For John Poulakos, “the rhetor who operates mainly with the awareness of *kairos* ... is both a hunter and maker of unique opportunities, always ready to address improvisationally and confer meaning on new and emerging situations” (1995, p.61). In these terms, the temporal opportunity of *kairos* has little power on its own; it requires the perceptions and actions of an individual capable of seizing its potential. Indeed, as Hawhee notes, “*kairos* entails the twin abilities to notice and respond with both mind and body. In other words, the capacity for discerning *kairos* ... depends on a ready, perceptive body” (2004, p.71). *Kairos* thus refers to the emergence of a temporal opening *and* the capacity or *readiness* of an individual to actively seize the opportunity therein. Significantly then, the temporal conditions of *kairos* can be created as much as awaited. Moreover, *kairos* is a temporal process of co-emergence or reciprocity, where the opening of opportunity’s aperture in the situation is co-emergent with the opening up or receptivity of the individual in response.

“Co-emergence — always embodied, always situated. In the situation opening, I am opening ... No basic distinction” (Cocker, Gansterer, Greil, 2015). The co-emergent nature of *kairos*, moreover, the cultivation of practices of attention for perceiving and responding to the conditions of its co-emergence have begun to be elaborated further within the context of *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*, an interdisciplinary research project developed in collaboration with artist Nikolaus Gansterer and choreographer Mariella Greil (alongside invited interlocutors Alex Arteaga, Christine de Smedt and Lilia Mestre). Our project unfolds through two interconnected aims: to explore the experience of ‘thinking-in-action’ or ‘thinking-feeling-knowing’ (Maharaj and Varela, 2012) operative within artistic exploration; and to develop forms of performativity and notation (*choreo-graphic figures*) for making tangible this often hidden, undisclosed aspect of the creative process (Figure 3). Within *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*, *kairos* is apprehended as part of a wider lexicon of ‘vitality affects’ that we refer to through the term ‘figuring’ (Cocker, Gansterer, Greil, 2015, 2016). We propose the term ‘figuring’ to describe the small yet transformative energies, emergences and experiential shifts that operate before, between and beneath the more readable gestures of artistic practice. A pre-appearance or *pre-acceleration* (Manning, 2009), those threshold micro-moments within the creative process that are often hard to discern but which ultimately shape or steer the direction of the evolving activity. Minor revelations or epiphanies: shivering, full of presence. Unbidden openings: those risings that give way to emergence. Within this research project, we have developed a practice of attention — used for cultivating somatic and perceptual awareness, qualities of alertness, receptivity and sensory heightening — in an attempt to become more hyper-sensitized or attuned to the different ‘vitality affects’ within our collaborative artistic explorations, at the same time as testing various systems of notation

— for example, an audible system of ‘clicks’ — for marking those moments when ‘something is happening’ within our shared practice.

Specifically within this research context, we approach the concept of *kairos* (or perhaps even *micro-kairos*) through the prism of Daniel Stern’s work on the dynamic ‘forms of vitality’, ‘now moments’ and ‘temporal thickness’ within everyday life as much as artistic practice (2004, 2010). Stern conceives of *kairos* as “both a subjective and a psychological unit of time”, considered in relation to how the ‘present moment’ “lean(s) toward a next action” (2004, p.xv). He argues that, *kairos* “is the coming into being of a new state of things, and it happens in a moment of awareness” (Stern, 2004, p.7). Moreover, he asks “How can we pry open *chronos* to create a present long enough to accommodate *kairos*?” (Stern, 2004, p.27). Stern points towards the concept of the ‘three part present’ developed by various philosophers from Husserl (1964) to Varela (1999). He notes how for Husserl the ‘three part present’ comprised: “a present-of-the-present moment (not so different from the present instance of *chronos*, the passing point of moving time)”, a “past-of-the-present moment” (‘retention’) and a “future-of-the-present moment” (‘protention’) (Stern, 2004, p.27). Within this model, as Stern asserts, the “future-of-the-present moment is part of the experience of the felt present moment because its foreshadow, even if vague, is acting at the present instant to give directionality and, at times, a sense of what is about to unfold” (2004, p.27). Here perhaps, this future-of-the-present moment could be considered in relation to Erin Manning’s writing on preacceleration and the incipency of movement, on the “immanence of movement moving: how movement can be felt before it actualizes” (2009, p.6). For Manning, “Preacceleration refers to the virtual force of a movement’s taking form ... Incipient movement preaccelerates a body toward its becoming” (2009, p.6). *Kairos* — the felt experience of the future-of-the-present moment; ‘seeping edge’ between the virtual and the actual, Negri’s “adventure beyond the edge of time” (2003, p.152).

Admittedly, this ‘opening’ up of reference takes the investigation of *kairos* within my own enquiry into new directions and conceptual territory, reflecting perhaps how my own *kairotic* journey has also shifted from research reflections on (other’s) practice, to a reflexive practice-as-research model. However, whilst I refer to a range of different practices and indeed conceptual contexts within this paper, certain questions and concerns in relation to *kairos* recur. Specifically, my interest remains in the dual principles of temporal *kairos*: how the *kairotic* capability of timing and timeliness (the seizing of ‘opportune time’) might be cultivated through ‘biding one’s time’, through a practice of ‘attention’ predicated on slowing down certain habitual rhythms and speeds, moreover, through the practicing of *diagonality*, a wilful leaning into the unknown, the void at the edge of time. Drawing on references from Ancient Greek rhetoric to contemporary art and philosophy, the paper points towards the reciprocal relation between creativity and temporality, for not only does the temporal experience of *kairos* (seized) give rise to creative lines of flight, but certain practices have the capacity to give rise to *kairos*. Indeed, certain practices can be conceived as exercises or *askesis* for cultivating the quality of ‘immanent awareness’ necessary to be both a *kairotic* “hunter and maker of unique opportunities” (Poulakos, 1995, p.61). The challenge then is to find ways of becoming more open, porous, more sensitized to the different temporal possibilities of the present. Moreover, this is a micro-political as much as artistic manoeuvre, since the future-oriented imperative of *kairos* involves the dual act of rupture and an affirmation of things otherwise. *Kairos* thus challenges the inevitability of a future conceived only as an extension of the present — *all is, as was, as will be* — by creating a temporal opening or interval within which to transform the “‘what is’ into ‘what is possible’” (Atwill, 1998, p.70).

Figures



Figure 1: Victoria Kent Gray, *Berthing Bone*, HD Video Stills, 2014



Figure 2: Emma Cocker and Clare Thornton, extract from artists' publication *The Italic I*, 2014.



Figure 3: Emma Cocker, Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil, *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*, documentation from 'Beyond the Line', pilot project at Bonington Gallery Nottingham, (April 2014) and the Summer 'Method lab' (July 2014).

Endnotes

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- ¹ My paper draws on and develops ideas from various collaborative projects, and I would like to thank (in order of mention) Andrew Brown, Katie Doubleday and Simone Kenyon (*Open City*); Alex McLean and Hester Reeve (*Live Notation*), Victoria Kent Gray (*Manual*), Clare Thornton (*The Italic I*), Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariela Greil (*Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*).
- ² *Open City* was founded by Andrew Brown in 2006, and evolved through collaboration with Katie Doubleday and Simone Kenyon. See Emma Cocker, ‘Performing Stillness: Community In Waiting’ in Bissell and Fuller, 2010.
- ³ The connection between *kairos* and the English word *nick*, used to refer to a critical moment (“just in the nick of time”) is made by Richard Onians (1951, p.347) cited in Rickert, 2013, p.79.
- ⁴ Rickert notes how “Phillip Sipiora lists a dozen meanings for *kairos* that have appeared in classical discourse, including ‘convenience’, ‘decorum’, ‘due measure’, ‘fitness’, ‘fruit’, ‘occasion’, ‘profit’, ‘proportion’, ‘propriety’, ‘symmetry’, ‘tact’, and ‘wise moderation’”, Rickert, 2013, p.75. See also Sipiora, 2002, pp. 1 — 22.
- ⁵ This section of the paper draws explicitly from my essay ‘Restless Line, Drawing’ in Russell Marshall and Phil Sawdon, 2012.
- ⁶ Whilst I draw on a rhetorical tradition of *kairos*, the concept is also developed — often with a theological or even messianic character — within the German tradition of *Geschichtsphilosophie* (for example, in the work of Paul Tillich and Walter Benjamin). Benjamin uses the term “now-time” or *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin, 1969). Simon Critchley (2009) notes how *kairos* also figures within Heidegger’s philosophy, conceived as ‘the moment of vision’ (*Augenblick*, literally ‘glance of the eye’). See also *The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger* (Bloomsbury Studies in Continental Philosophy, 2014).
- ⁷ Sarat Maharaj differentiates a form of non-knowledge, “distinct from the circuits of *know-how* that run on clearly spelled out methodological steel tracks. It is the rather unpredictable surge and ebb of potentialities and propensities — the flux of *no-how*.” Maharaj, 2009.
- ⁸ For Negri, “*Kairòs* rests then in the eternal. Better still: *kairòs* is the eternal that creates. This eternal is prior to us, because it is at its edge that we create and that we augment being, that is to say, eternity.” Negri, 2003, p.167.
- ⁹ Funded by the AHRC Digital Transformations theme. See also
- ¹⁰ See <http://www.victoriagray.co.uk/berthingbone>.
- ¹¹ The text draws on the Spinozist formulation “we don’t know what a body can do” (Deleuze, 1978).

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