



Lecture 10 Essay Seminar – Sculpting in Time

Week 4 | Time, Memory and the Archive

Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)

(Generic) Question 4. Time, Memory and the Archive: *In what ways do contemporary artists and designers reimagine time, memory, and archival practice, whether through repetition, rupture, slowness, or non-linear temporality? How do these temporal aesthetics intersect with cultural, technological, or historical concerns?*

Temporal Aesthetics in Contemporary Art and Design

Bill Viola, Hanne Darboven, Christian Marclay, Katie Paterson, Tomás Saraceno

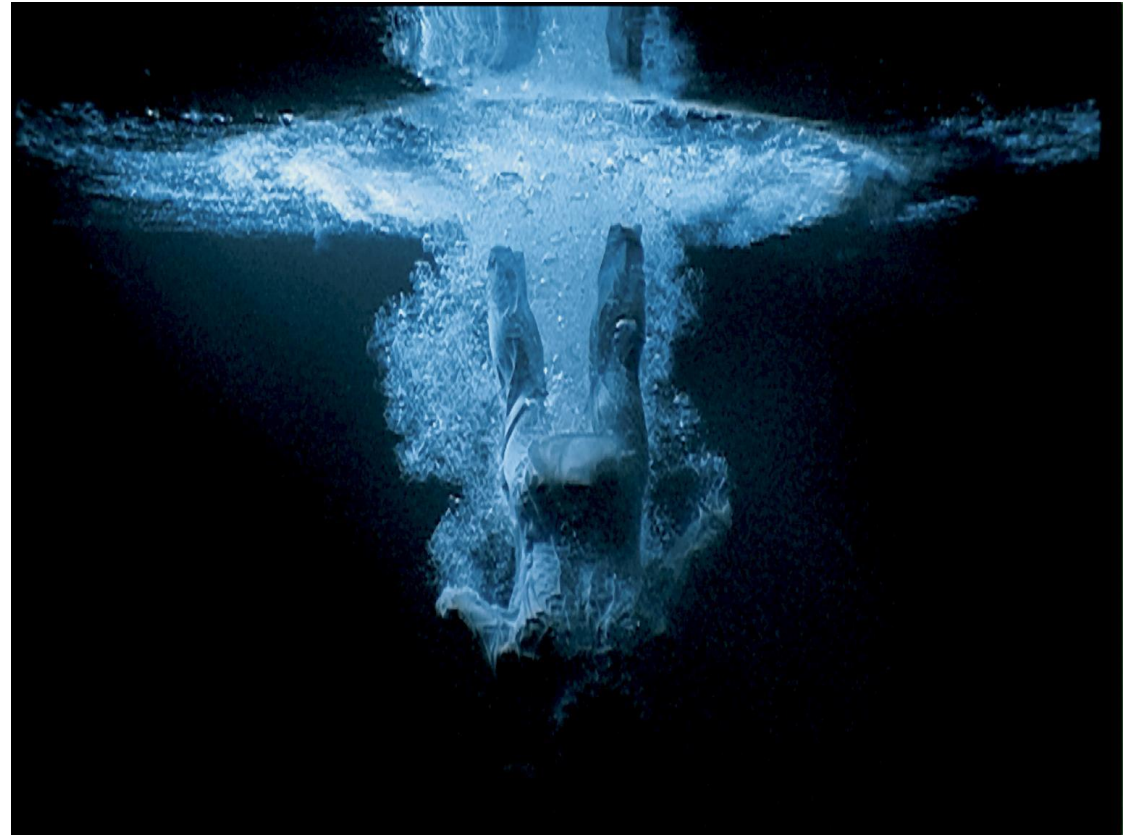
Example Essay 1 - Bill Viola: Temporal Memory and the Aesthetics of Duration

Focused Essay Question(4): How does **Bill Viola's** use of slowness and repetition reimagine time and memory as affective experiences rather than narrative structures?

Bill Viola: Temporal Memory and the Aesthetics of Duration



The Passions (2003)



Five Angels for the Millennium (2001)

EXAMPLE 1 – Bill Viola: Temporal Memory and the Aesthetics of Duration

Essay Question

How does Bill Viola's use of slowness and repetition reimagine time and memory as affective experiences rather than narrative structures?

Thesis Statement

Through an embodied phenomenology of time, Bill Viola transforms the medium of video into an affective archive, where slowness and repetition dissolve linear temporality to evoke states of remembrance and transcendence.

Theorists / Concepts:

Henri Bergson — *duration (durée)* as qualitative time

Maurice Merleau-Ponty — embodied perception, lived temporality

Laura Marks — *haptic visuality* and affective memory

Brian Massumi — affect as temporal intensity ("the missing half-second")

Themes: Phenomenology, affect, and time perception

Outline Essay Structure

1. Introduction:

Introduce the problem of time and memory in contemporary art. Present Viola as a key figure in slow, durational video art. Outline the argument: that Viola's manipulation of temporal perception invites an embodied experience of memory aligned with Bergsonian duration and affect theory.

2. Phenomenological Time (Bergson & Merleau-Ponty):

Explain *duration* as lived rather than measured time. Discuss how Viola's temporal elongation allows viewers to inhabit moments as continuous, immersive experiences rather than sequential frames.

3. The Affective Archive (Marks & Massumi):

Explore how haptic imagery and affective resonance transform Viola's works into sensory archives of emotion. The repetition of gestures and suspended motion record not events but intensities — memory as feeling rather than fact.

4. Memory and Spirituality:

Consider how Viola's imagery (water, breath, rebirth) articulates memory as transformation, aligning the body with cyclical or sacred time. Compare with Tarkovsky's *Sculpting in Time* and his metaphysical notion of duration.

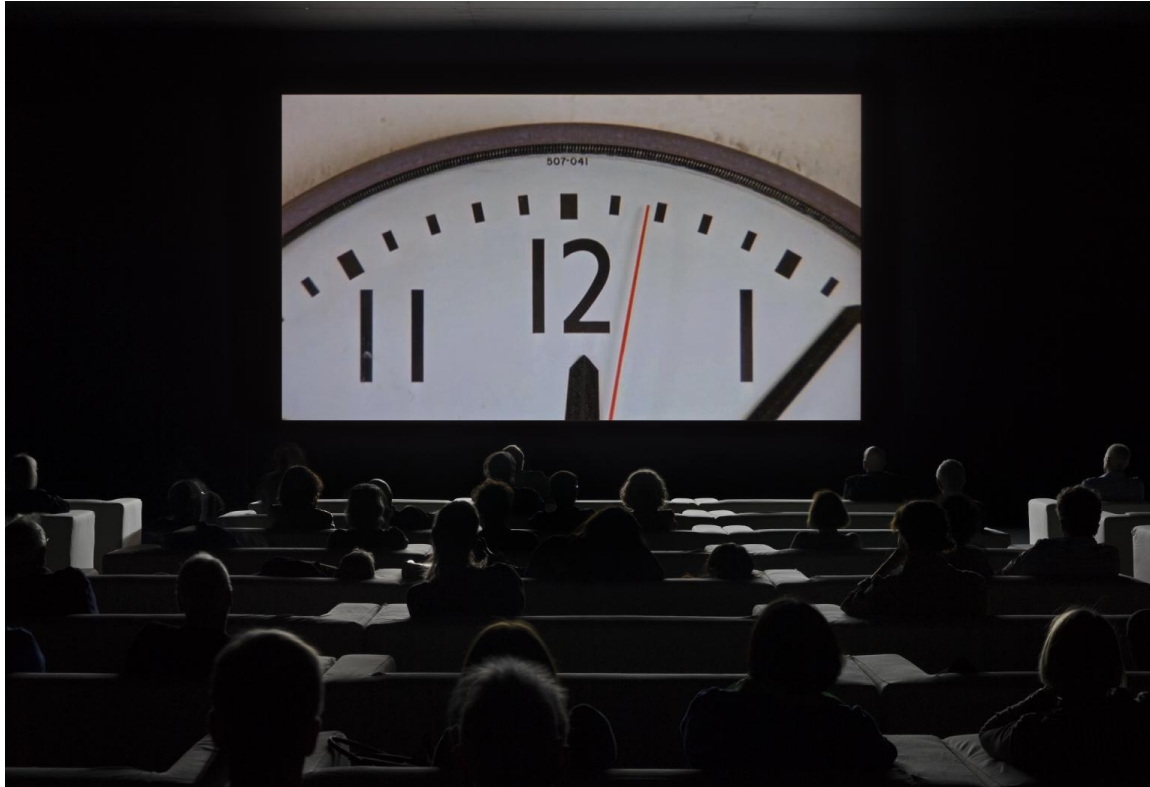
5. Conclusion:

Summarise how Viola reimagine the archive as experiential rather than documentary. The slowness of his art opens a temporal space for reflection, turning technological time into embodied time.

Example Essay 2: Archiving the Instant: Material Time and Technological Memory

Focused Essay Question(4): How do **Hanne Darboven** and **Christian Marclay** transform the archive into a performative system of timekeeping that reveals the entropic and constructed nature of technological memory?

Archiving the Instant: Material Time and Technological Memory



The Clock (2010)



Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983 (1980–83)

EXAMPLE 2 — Archiving the Instant: Material Time and Technological Memory

Essay Question

How do Hanne Darboven and Christian Marclay transform the archive into a performative system of timekeeping that reveals the entropic and constructed nature of technological memory?

Thesis Statement

Through seriality and data accumulation, Darboven and Marclay reveal the archive as an unstable, temporal performance — a space where repetition produces both memory and loss, continuity and collapse.

Theorists / Concepts

- **Walter Benjamin** — mechanical reproduction, aura, and historical index
- **Karen Barad** — *spacetime mattering*; time as material entanglement
- **Jussi Parikka** — *geological media*, entropy, and deep time
- **Foucault** — *the archive* as epistemic structure (from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*)

Themes: Materiality, entropy, and digital temporality

Outline Essay Structure

1. Introduction:

Define the archive not as static storage but as temporal performance. Introduce Darboven and Marclay as artists who reconfigure archival logic through systems of repetition, documentation, and montage.

2. The Archival Condition (Foucault & Benjamin):

Discuss how both artists expose the archive's dependence on repetition and technological mediation. Link Benjamin's concept of "constellations" of history to Marclay's cinematic montage.

3. Time as Material Process (Barad & Parikka):

Position Darboven's obsessive numeric documentation as a form of material inscription — time embodied in process and labour. Parikka's "geologic media" lens reframes this as a sedimented, temporal stratigraphy of marks.

4. Entropy and Rupture:

Analyse *The Clock* as a cinematic system that both synchronises and fragments time. Its real-time function makes it an archive that never ends — a performance of entropy where continuity collapses into exhaustion.

5. Conclusion:

Conclude that Darboven and Marclay reimagine archival practice not as preservation but as temporal exposure — where memory is perpetually rewritten by the material and technological processes that sustain it.

EXAMPLE Essay 3 — Deep Time and the Ecological Archive

Focused Essay Question(4): How do contemporary artists such as **Katie Paterson and Tomás Saraceno** reimagine the archive as an ecological system that embodies deep, non-human temporalities?

Deep Time and the Ecological Archive



Future Library (2014–2114)
Katie Paterson



Hybrid Webs (2018)
Tomás Saraceno

EXAMPLE 3 — Deep Time and the Ecological Archive

Essay Question

How do contemporary artists such as Katie Paterson and Tomás Saraceno reimagine the archive as an ecological system that embodies deep, non-human temporalities?

Thesis Statement

Through projects that engage with cosmic and biological time, Paterson and Saraceno reframe the archive as a living network — an interspecies and planetary process of memory-making that challenges anthropocentric conceptions of duration and history.

Theorists / Concepts

- **Donna Haraway** — *staying with the trouble*; the *thick present*
- **Timothy Morton** — *hyperobjects* and ecological time
- **Anna Tsing** — multi-species histories; temporal entanglement
- **Yuk Hui** — *cosmotechnics*; cultural time and technological worlding

Themes: Posthuman temporality, ecology, and non-human archives

Outline Essay Structure

1. Introduction:

Introduce the notion of ecological time — the vast temporalities of geological, cosmic, and biological processes. Situate Paterson and Saraceno within posthuman and new materialist discourse.

2. The Thick Present (Haraway & Morton):

Discuss how *Future Library* embodies Haraway's concept of "making kin across timescales." Explore Morton's *hyperobjects* as invisible temporal systems shaping experience beyond human perception.

3. Living Archives (Tsing):

Analyse Saraceno's *Hybrid Webs* as a co-created, living archive of interspecies labour. Tsing's *multi-species history* reframes the web as a temporal document of collaboration and ecological memory.

4. Cosmotechnics and Futures (Hui):

Connect these practices to Hui's *cosmotechnics*, suggesting that both artists generate new relations between technology, culture, and time — an art of co-becoming rather than control.

5. Conclusion:

Conclude that such works expand the concept of the archive beyond storage and recollection, toward an ethics of care and continuity across temporal and species boundaries — reimagining art as a planetary archive of becoming.

Essay	Conceptual Lens	Theorists	Practitioners	Temporal Strategy
1. Affective Duration	Phenomenology & Affect	Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Marks, Massumi	Bill Viola	Slowness, repetition, sensory memory
2. Archiving the Instant	Materiality & Technological Time	Benjamin, Barad, Parikka, Foucault	Darboven, Marclay	Repetition, entropy, data accumulation
3. Deep Time Archive	Ecology & Posthumanism	Haraway, Morton, Tsing, Hui	Paterson, Saraceno	Deep time, non-linearity, interspecies temporality

Temporal Aesthetics in Moving Image Practice

Stan Brakhage, James Benning, Tacita Dean

EXAMPLE Essay 4 — The Light of Duration: Stan Brakhage and the Poetics of Perception

Focused Essay Question(4): How does **Stan Brakhage's** hand-crafted cinema reveal time as an extension of perception rather than as representation?

The Light of Duration: Stan Brakhage and the Poetics of Perception



The Dante Quartet (1987)



Mothlight (1963)

EXAMPLE 4 - The Light of Duration: Stan Brakhage and the Poetics of Perception

Essay Question

How does Stan Brakhage's hand-crafted cinema reveal time as an extension of perception rather than as representation?

Thesis Statement

In films such as *The Dante Quartet* (1987) and *Mothlight* (1963), Brakhage transforms film into an embodied act of seeing, where time becomes light itself — a Bergsonian *durée* rendered through the tactile materiality of vision.

Theorists / Concepts

- **Henri Bergson** — *duration* as qualitative flow
- **Gilles Deleuze** — *time-image* and the cinema of thought
- **Maurice Merleau-Ponty** — embodied perception
- **Stan Brakhage** — *Metaphors on Vision* (artist-theorist voice)

Themes: embodied act of seeing

Outline Essay Structure

1. **Introduction** – Position Brakhage within the American avant-garde. Introduce the idea that his films collapse boundaries between image and experience, aligning cinema with phenomenology.
2. **Bergsonian Duration** – Explain Bergson's *durée* as lived continuity. Analyse Brakhage's painted frames as temporal micro-events that express movement without representation.
3. **Deleuze's Time-Image** – Relate Brakhage's non-narrative montage to Deleuze's time-image: vision freed from sensory-motor schemas, revealing time as pure optical flow.
4. **Embodied Vision** – Discuss Merleau-Ponty's embodied perception and how Brakhage's scratching, splicing, and painting create a tactile temporality — the body inscribed in film.
5. **Conclusion** – Summarise how Brakhage reimagines cinema as perceptual time itself, turning film into a luminous archive of vision and duration.

EXAMPLE Essay 5 — Slow Light: James Benning's Ten Skies and the Temporal Sublime

Focused Essay Question(4): How does **James Benning's *Ten Skies* (2004)** transform cinematic duration into an experience of temporal attention and ecological awareness?

Slow Light: James Benning's *Ten Skies* and the Temporal Sublime



Ten Skies (2004)

EXAMPLE 5 - Slow Light: James Benning's *Ten Skies* and the Temporal Sublime

Essay Question

How does James Benning's *Ten Skies* (2004) transform cinematic duration into an experience of temporal attention and ecological awareness?

Thesis Statement

Through extreme slowness and minimal composition, Benning reconfigures time as a site of observation and contemplation, aligning the film with phenomenological and ecological notions of deep attention and the "temporal sublime."

Theorists / Concepts

- **Henri Bergson** — duration, pure succession
- **Martin Heidegger** — *being-in-time*, dwelling, waiting
- **Mary Ann Doane** — cinematic time and spectatorship
- **Timothy Morton** — ecological perception, hyperobjects

Themes: cinematic time, duration, being-in-time

Outline Essay Structure

1. **Introduction** – Present Benning as an heir to structural cinema who shifts attention from narrative to temporality itself. Define "temporal sublime."
2. **Duration as Observation (Bergson)** – Analyse how fixed shots allow time to unfold qualitatively; each cloud formation becomes an event of becoming.
3. **Dwelling and Being-in-Time (Heidegger)** – Examine the act of watching as dwelling; slowness produces awareness of one's own temporality and mortality.
4. **Ecological Temporality (Morton)** – Situate *Ten Skies* within ecological aesthetics: sky and atmosphere as planetary time registers, not scenic backgrounds.
5. **Conclusion** – Argue that Benning's cinema teaches spectators to *see time* — a pedagogy of attention that resists the acceleration of digital culture.

EXAMPLE Essay 6 — Ephemeral Horizons: Tacita Dean and the Memory of the Moment

Focused Essay Question(4): In what ways does Tacita Dean's *The Green Ray* (2001) explore the intersection of time, chance, and disappearance as a form of contemporary archival practice?



Ephemeral Horizons: Tacita Dean and the Memory of the Moment

The Green Ray (2001)

EXAMPLE 6 - Ephemeral Horizons: Tacita Dean and the Memory of the Moment

Essay Question

In what ways does Tacita Dean's *The Green Ray* (2001) explore the intersection of time, chance, and disappearance as a form of contemporary archival practice?

Thesis Statement

Dean's pursuit of the elusive green ray transforms film into a meditation on waiting and loss, where the archive becomes an impossible record — an act of faith in the vanishing instant.

Theorists / Concepts

- **Walter Benjamin** — aura, the moment of recognition (*Jetztzeit*)
- **Henri Bergson** — duration and intuition
- **Roland Barthes** — the photographic *that-has-been*
- **Rebecca Schneider** — performance and the re-appearance of the past

Themes: ephemerality, aura, seeing, absence

Outline Essay Structure

1. **Introduction** – Introduce Dean's practice of analogue film and her interest in recording impermanence. Frame the essay around the paradox of attempting to archive the ungraspable.
2. **The Moment of Aura (Benjamin)** – Discuss the green ray as a fleeting auratic event that collapses past and present — a flash of *Jetztzeit* disrupting homogeneous time.
3. **Temporal Intuition (Bergson)** – Analyse how Dean's durational waiting foregrounds intuition and embodied anticipation rather than representation.
4. **Failure and Trace (Barthes / Schneider)** – Explore how the film's almost-absence becomes its meaning; the failure to capture becomes the record itself, a performative archive of disappearance.
5. **Conclusion** – Argue that *The Green Ray* redefines archival practice as attentiveness and longing — a poetics of duration that preserves the time of waiting, not the event itself.

Essay	Core Lens	Theorists	Artist / Film	Temporal Strategy
4. Light of Duration	Perceptual / Phenomenological	Bergson, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty	Stan Brakhage – The Dante Quartet	Luminous durée, embodied vision
5. Slow Light	Phenomenology & Ecology	Bergson, Heidegger, Morton	James Benning – Ten Skies	Slowness, attention, temporal sublime
6. Ephemeral Horizons	Archival / Poetic Time	Benjamin, Barthes, Bergson	Tacita Dean – The Green Ray	Waiting, disappearance, aura