

# Introduction

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SHEPHERD STEINER

**M**osaic 55.1 is the first of two issues that present the proceedings of an online conference titled *Relative Time/Little Time*. Working collaboratively with the Dutch artists Bik Van der Pol, the project sought to promote a multinational and multidisciplinary forum that leaned into far more public and far more urgent political questions than the journal had traditionally broached. The precise subject of inquiry was the deep pool of experience that was emerging in and around the question of time in the two-year period during which the world was gripped by pandemic. The different granularities of time—its elasticity, its shortening as well as its after-effects, its links to economy, ecology, geological history, colonialism, the abbreviated horizon it finds in the climate crisis—were to mark an important transition for *Mosaic*. The reorientation was a question of the timeliness of academic work, and the positioning of that work in a way that is more forthrightly imbricated in the issues that dominate public discourse and impact everyday life. With a particular emphasis on our ever-loosening grip on futurity and the untimeliness of solutions, the conference, which took place between November 2021 and April 2022, turned on a range of high-profile scholarly contributions, collaborations, interventions by artists, work in the field by activists, and the perspectives of emerging scholars.

The acutely political work of Bik Van der Pol was crucial for galvanizing all of this. Their projects typically hinge on archival politics, collaboration, and activating situations, and are always driven to push discourse into shaping the public sphere. In late 2020 *Mosaic* invited them to investigate the gaps and blindnesses that were constitutive of the journal as an institution and archive. The archival issue that resulted (see *Mosaic* 54.3) aimed to understand the limits, logic, and dynamics of the *Mosaic* archive, to identify the slow creep of ideological processes, which leave their trace over time, and finally, to hasten the progress of select threads of the journal's discursive history. The politico-aesthetic edge that was the initial result of our collaboration sharpens and comes to a focus here in issues 55.1 and 55.2. This is especially clear from the interdisciplinary nature of the essays presented here, the often collaborative working methods instanced, and the level playing field accorded to artists, critical thinkers, and academics.

The original idea for *Relative Time/Little Time* came into shape as a focus on the different granularities of time beginning in 1989, with the marked acceleration of capital, and ending in 2020, when the world came to a halt under the influence of the pandemic. This trajectory and its differing velocities—what we experienced especially as the sputtering stops and starts of quarantine and vaccine—gave rise to a number of questions that keyed time to the vicissitudes of economy and its temporal technologies as much as the chronotypes of a simpler life apparently bordering on nature. At no time in recent memory have so many so viscerally felt the deceleration of working life and conversely been caught up in the increasingly frenetic pace of world events. The social bond never felt so fragile and seemed so precious. Life as we knew it became fundamentally unglued, and yet if the degree of separation between people, the environment, and the inhuman were pushed to a breaking point—for the most part, aggressively pixelated and lived more than ever in screen-light—our relational ties with others, nature, and the world of things also tightened in unexpected ways. Ultimately, the way *Relative Time/Little Time* opens up the granularity of time to questions of lifedeath links this altogether new existential crisis in Western democracies to the “nocturnal face” of colonialism, probes the prosthetic extensions of temporal life through technology, thinks time geologically as a function of resource extraction at sites of Indigenous life, and, finally, reveals a range of functional relationships between time and mobility, ecology, neurodiversity, geo-political spaces, the war-economy, sleep, social justice, philosophy, media theory, sociology, photography, and affect theory. But none of this would be so perspicacious without the essays collected here from our contributors.

In “The Untimely Impersonal” Erin Manning continues one thread of her thinking on the spatiality of the neurotypical world and the temporality of the neurodiverse. Unfinishedness, process, and the not-yet-shaped, which Manning calls movement at the pace of the “untimely” and “personal,” is set in tension to a relationship with the world where use, misuse, and abuse predominate. Through a number of metaleptic reversals that push the aesthetic encounter into the terrain of everyday life where it matters the most, she gives an account of “time’s activity,” a kind of continuum that provides access to “minor sociality” and the possibility of standing in a different relationship to things, people, and events. In her wonderful argument this adjacency to force is where we might “make a day.”

With more than a little humour and with an untiring critical eye, Paul Huebener provides us with the tools to develop what he calls “a critical literacy of sleep in a restless world.” With examples drawn from Canada’s own leading specialty sleep retailer, Sleep Country Canada, the sleep expert takes on the nation’s “sleep expert.” No specialty mattress, expensive pillow and bedding set, or must-have sleep accessory will ever be so emotionally laden with the unspent energies of the workaday world again. The title of Heubener’s essay is “Sleep Through This Article: On Imagining Sleep in Canada,” and unlike the mimetic relationship urged upon viewers by Bik Van der Pol’s *Sleep with Me*, an iterative film installation that involves the re-screening of Andy Warhol’s film *Sleep* (1964), with pillows and blankets provided, one will not be put to sleep, but lulled into thought. Having slept between furrows of lavender once in my bohemian life, sweet dreams will only point so far as the likes of Rimbaud’s “*amours splendides*” rather than the horrors of contemporary life.

Jonas Staal goes by the description of visual artist dealing with the relationship between art, propaganda, and democracy. This falls well short of the incredible range of projects Staal has been involved in and the complexity of ways his practice transforms art, gives propaganda a positive valence, and radicalizes our notion of democracy. The title of Staal’s essay is “Collectivize Time, Redistribute the Future,” and given that his politics are performative or propositional, I think he would agree if I suggested that readers focus on content as well as take up a position beside him upstream from content.

Denise Ferreira da Silva is both an academic and a practicing artist. Her work crosses the boundaries between ethics, politics, and activism. Questions of violence, value, and blackness put race, colonialism, and capital in relation and motion in ways that only temporality as an unspoken future can articulate. Repetition and its reiteration provide the crucial pathway to thinking what she calls “negative accumulation.” I first encountered her thinking in the film work *INFINITY Minus Infinity* by the

Otolith Group and I sought out more of her work shortly after. The title of her essay is “Negative Accumulation, or That Which Happens without Time.”

Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin are principal co-investigators and co-curators of the exhibition-led inquiry *Reassembling the Natural*. The title of their lecture is “How Long Has This Been Going On: Natural History, Political Economy, and the Times of the Anthropocene.” In it they provide a compellingly pragmatic approach to thinking contemporary time through crisis, how one crisis overlays or underwrites another, strings events together, and is variously instanced at different scales and within vastly different spheres of practice and knowledge, especially the art field, natural history, political economy, and bookmaking.

Our final collaborative contribution is from curator Marina McDougall and artist Steven Duval. Their essay is titled “Climate Change as Oppressor: Our Growing Ecological Imperative.” This is a text rich in examples of local, boots-on-the-ground projects that variously resist the monetization of green capital. Relational art in the expanded sense blurs here with socially engaged art keyed to environmentally progressive practices. The snapshot provided is one that would have pleased Félix Guattari. Multiplicities gain an edge over binary thinking and a single-issue politics to link very singular pragmatic working groups with feminist circles, anti-racists, and a pedagogy detached from a hegemonic environmentalism and taught instead by the natural field.

Recordings of all the lectures and question periods printed here are available to the public on the *Mosaic* website. Special thanks to the sponsors of our conference: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Manitoba Conference Sponsorship Program, and lastly the Faculty of Arts, the School of Art, and the Institute for the Humanities, all at the University of Manitoba.

Finally, we at *Mosaic* would like to acknowledge that our offices at the University of Manitoba campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Red River Métis. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of Reconciliation and collaboration.