

# *urtykorfmann*

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## **The Nature of Time**

by Rogério Taveira

Duration is a period of time made up of countless instants. And while the instant is commonly and unduly associated with the act of photography, this fact derives above all from ideas about the instantaneous. As an artistic process, photography cannot be constructed in an instant. We might accept that while the imaginary subject may appear instantaneously, the act of photography as an artistic experience and experiment does not. This artistic action, as with any other, results from an actor aware and engaging with that needed from time and incorporating time as a material. This is an act established out of a duration. And where this duration is directly related with the act of reflection and criticism, then the act of execution also bears its own duration. This results from the former and simultaneously incorporates it as only the critical and progressive reformulation of concepts and approaches may ensure that any creative action reaches its due destination. Should such action be merely instantaneous, then the images produced are stripped of any meaning they might otherwise attain beyond that stemming from pure representation. Representation and meaning are two interlocking axes. Representation is a horizontal axis, stable in its connection to reality, with meaning becoming a vertical axis rising out of the depths of emptiness to reach as high as the multiplicity of possible interpretations. The multiplicity of consciousness enables us to progress up this vertical axis when instigated by the produced or constructed image. This progress is, in itself, also a duration. This duration is relative to the multiple that we distinguish from the exhausted representation based approach. The object—the photographic image—in contemporary art is not built out of that represented but rather out of the sought after end meaning.

The subject worked by photography is thus time: assumed as a transformative and creative power. This power is encountered throughout all the phases to the creative process: from conceptual design through to implementation. Furthermore, should we focus solely on the task of taking photographs, which is the special placing of the object before the camera, the composition and finally the time allocated for the chemical to absorb the effects of the light reflected by the objects under study, we find the entire process is mediated by duration. Should space only be understandable in time, if the compositional process incorporates its own story and finally the exposure of the chemicals contain a measurable time, it is hence easy to grasp how the material inherent to an act of photography takes on narrative form, as art itself: in its time of duration, in its creative qualities.

Bergson wrote: "The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new."<sup>1</sup>

Duration is the subject matter Katrin Korfmann works on both in photography and in urban installations. We may state that, irrespective of the piece in question, the work of Katrin Korfmann results from reflecting on the workings of photography in their most profound sense. This involves working time and shaping it in different fashions while still maintaining the same questioning. Only thus can we understand the recurring extinction of recognisable space that Korfmann deliberately targets. Space is worked particularly through its temporal components: suspension and rhythm. In her urban installations, where such extinction is more to the fore, Korfmann deploys large, temporary and strongly coloured walls that seek to establish a new relationship between the viewer and the surrounding spaces. This would be the obvious reading, however, there does also seem to be an infra-reading that places these installations within the field of questioning time and not of space. More specifically, they remind us that space only exists in time. As conscious beings, we also exist in time, in various times. There are at least two: that of the body and of the soul, or material and spirit according to Bergson. Each also bears both differing durations and lives. Absolutely blue walls (Blue Octagon) or those in pink (Pink Wall) bring about a merger, even if only momentarily, of the two constituent aspects of being in a time verging on that experienced when dreaming: a suspended time, non-referential. At this point, we are confronted by the Self prior to searching for references in relation to this new space generated by the object. We may complementarily refer to Susan Sontag<sup>2</sup> and her account of the importance of the photographic camera as a means of appropriating an unknown space. As an object of security in an insecure environment, we may perhaps understand that that insecurity in new surroundings relates more to the confrontation of the self than to some search for physical points of reference. This is hence why we shall find in some of the images documenting these installations individuals 'armed' with cameras. Armed against themselves. Against the possibility of the body seeing its role reduced to the detriment of the soul.

What other question might prove as overwhelming as confrontation with finitude? That is the question of photography. The issue of the inalterability of the image produced out of a reality always undergoing mutation.

Once again, Korfmann seeks to balance this temporal question through constructing photographic images based on fragmentary moments within the same space before then reconstructing them in a new and unrecognisable space. In accordance with this same principle, Korfmann takes two approaches: one in which registration is submitted to a measured duration, firstly to a period of decomposition and secondly to a re-composition, and another in which distinct temporal fragments are incorporated into the same space, thus immediately into the same time.

The first of these means of appropriating duration recalls the first experiments by Muybridge into the decomposition of physical movement through a system incorporating various photographic cameras and which was to result in the emergence of cinema. While this is first referenced, it is then withdrawn given

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1) BERGSON, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913. p.11

2) SONTAG, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books. 2002

that Katrin does not seek to break down movement. Such movement exists but not as an active participant rather only as a temporal, rhythmic function. The decomposition of registered time into a new equation based on the cinematographic principle of 24 photograms per second, leads us once again to a new spatial abstraction endowed with only the duration and a predominant colour (Green, two minutes; White, one Minute; Grey, 12min30sec; Blue 02, almost 1 Minute; Silver, 4min). Here, we have to excavate time to access the various diverse levels of these (re)constructions: the duration of the act of taking the shot, given at the beginning, the duration of appropriating the action, that is, the time in which we may perceive the fragment of the real used, the duration of the perception of each photograph as an isolated form – which in turn opens up onto another photographic question, the depth of the background almost always greater than human vision and which hence ensures that we read photographic images in a totally different way to the way we establish contact with daily reality and far slower given the time taken to actually grasp all of the details contained within the respective shot. Katrin Korfmann thereby constructed 'blocks' of perception. Blocks built out of the rhythmic durations of real bodily movement. In the second aforementioned approach, Korfmann makes recourse to another form of construction that may be described as less direct given that in the first approach, the photograms are deployed in their purest formats, hence without any digital manipulation beyond that resulting from their associations whereas in the second, digital manipulation is incorporated as part of the material under construction. Once again, Katrin inserts the duration of the photographic process into the titles of pieces: *Waiting for Júlia* (3x10min); *1.5h Toys*; *Fast Forward, Checkpoint Charlie* (1.8h); *Waiting for Atousa* (1h); *Love, Power & Money* (24 min). Once again, we find further emphasis on the idea of duration. Taking into consideration the titles, we find that the majority are classifications of their temporal states – waiting, fast forward. The contractions of various durations into a single time, through the digital creation of a non-reality, leads us again back to how the essence of photography contains a favourable means of questioning the real and resulting in Korfmann suspending this generated time.

The work of Katrin Korfmann steps forward as a materialisation of the photographic not only through photography itself but also through urban installations. Photography not as form or technique but rather as a concept: as the formalisation of time as matter. The photographic as a way of seeking out the nature of time.

Lisbon, February 2009