



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

## Stepping out of Time: Performing Queer Temporality, Memory, and Relationality in Timelining

Kessel, L. van

### Citation

Kessel, L. van. (2017). Stepping out of Time: Performing Queer Temporality, Memory, and Relationality in Timelining. *Journal Of The Lucas Graduate Conference*, 5, 102-123. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/46730>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/46730>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



05  
2017

# Breaking the Rules

*Artistic Expressions of  
Transgression*

The *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* was founded in 2013 to publish a selection of the best papers presented at the biennial LUCAS Graduate Conference, an international and interdisciplinary humanities conference organized by the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS). The peer reviewed journal aims to publish papers that combine an innovative approach with fresh ideas and solid research, and engage with the key theme of LUCAS, the relationship and dynamics between the arts and society.

#### SERIES EDITOR

Sara Polak

#### EDITORS IN CHIEF

Karine Laporte

Fleur Praal

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

Yves van Damme

Andrea De March

Nynke Feenstra

Renske Janssen

Elizabeth Mitchell

#### LAYOUT

Andrea Reyes Elizondo

The *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*, **ISSN 2214-191X**, is published once a year, on 1 February, by Leiden University Library (Witte Singel 27, 2311 BG Leiden, the Netherlands).

#### OPEN ACCESS STATEMENT

The *JLGC* provides barrier-free access; all content of the journal is available immediately upon publication. Our policy aligns with Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND: we welcome all readers to download and share our articles and issues freely, as long as the author and journal are appropriately credited. *JLGC*-material cannot however be altered or used commercially.

#### DISCLAIMER

Statements of fact and opinion in the articles in the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* are those of the respective authors and not necessarily of the editors, LUCAS or Leiden University Library. Neither Leiden University Library nor LUCAS nor the editors of this journal make any representation, explicit or implied, in respect of the accuracy of the material in this journal and cannot accept any responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

#### WEBSITE

For more information about the journal, please see our website at <http://hum.leiden.edu/lucas/jlgc>

# STEPPING OUT OF TIME PERFORMING QUEER TEMPORALITY, MEMORY, AND RELATIONALITY IN *TIMELINING*

Looi van Kessel

Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands

*In their performance Timelining, Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly explore the ways in which intimate relationships are constituted in time. The performance consists of a memory game in which two performers retrace their shared history as a couple. Throughout the performance, the various actions prompted by the memory game question the unity of the couple, instead casting the performers' relationship as what I will call a two-togetherness. This article looks at Timelining through the lens of queer temporality to scrutinize the operations of different social experiences of time in the constitution of the couple as a two-togetherness. It then interrogates, investigates, and explores the ways in which the performance undermines normative assumptions about the constitution of intimate relationships within time. By breaking down categories of time and memory, Gerard and Kelly suggest that each intimate relationship, whether normative or queer, is constituted through the impossibility of conforming to normative conceptions of time.*

1 For more images and information about the performance of *Timelining*, see <http://gerardandkelly.com/projects/timelining/>.

*Timelining* (2014)<sup>1</sup> is a performance by New York-based choreographers Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly. It was first presented at the New York gallery The Kitchen during March and April 2014. Subsequently it has been performed at the Mona Bismarck American Center in Paris and at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, again in New York. Through the staging of *Timelining*, Gerard and Kelly explore the ways in which relationships are constituted

through experiences of time and memory. For each staging of *Timelining*, two performers who are in some sort of relationship follow a choreography, or score, designed by Gerard and Kelly to foreground the temporal dimension that undergirds the foundation of the performers' relationship to one another. Over the course of the performance, each performer narrates events of h/er life in a backward fashion: starting with the immediate present and going back to the moment s/he was born. The recountings of their life events, however, are not just solitary actions for these performers. Instead, the performers take turns in narrating their lives, they listen to each other, and they respond to items that are narrated by the other performer. What unfolds is a memory game in which certain memories prompt specific bodily and verbal responses, which in turn give way to new memories narrated by the performers.

While playing their memory game, the performers jump back and forth through their own personal history by means of a game of association and interaction. These personal timelines, which the score calls 'chronologies',<sup>2</sup> are retraced step by step. Each performer recounts h/er own personal memories, yet both chronologies are also inextricably wrapped up in one another; one performer's memories might trigger certain recollections in the other, and vice versa. The performance explores a tension between cultural assumptions about intimate relationships and the lived and embodied experiences thereof. This article explores *Timelining's* foregrounding of the experience of intimacy as it is produced through the experience of social time and embodied memories. It argues that by foregrounding the tension between cultural assumptions about and lived experiences of intimate relationships, *Timelining* enables a reframing of the cultural knowledge that is embedded in the social organization of such relationships. This is a reframing that emphasizes the queerness at the heart of every relationship, whether it is an intergenerational relationship (e.g. parent-child), or a relationship between siblings, friends, or lovers.

<sup>2</sup> Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, "Score for *Timelining*" (unpublished manuscript, 11 November 2014), Microsoft Word file.

Although relationships, memory, and the experience of time are important elements of the performance, other categories, such as space, movement, the body, and the spectator, also play a significant role in its staging. Before I can address the complex way in which these elements interact and allow us to think about how relationships are constituted through experiences of time and memory, I must first describe *Timelining* in more detail. Unless otherwise noted, my description and analysis of the performance piece will refer to the score that instructs the performers in the rules of the performance's memory game, and to the initial run of *Timelining*. Due to the improvised nature of the performer's chronologies, I have chosen to give few specific examples of the performers' memories. However, I exemplify instructions from Ryan and Kelly's score with recollections from my own encounter with the performance piece at The Kitchen. Citations from the memory game are, then, predominantly based on my own memory of the performance, or even mere fabrications that have formed in my mind while thinking back to *Timelining*. Notwithstanding the accuracy of my own remembrance of these memories, their function is to illustrate *Timelining's* exploration of memories that constitute the social formation of couples.

### PLAYING WITH TIME

When the spectator walks into The Kitchen, the gallery space in which *Timelining* was first performed, s/he enters an almost empty room. In a corner, two performers are seated. The moment someone steps into the gallery space, the performers get up and start walking in circles, side by side, crossing the black line on the floor time and again (Figs 1 and 2). The performance has started.

In the initial walk, or "exposition",<sup>3</sup> that kicks off the performance, the performers go through all the motions that the memory game calls for. In silence they continue walking in circles while sometimes changing directions,

<sup>3</sup> Gerard and Kelly, "Score for *Timelining*".



Fig. 1

Performance view, The Kitchen,  
New York, NY, April 2014.

Pictured: Ted Heningson and Todd  
McQuade.

Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein. Picture  
courtesy of Gerard and Kelly

switching sides, or coming to a halt; these are actions that are designated by the score as “links”, “loops”, and “triggers”. After this short exposition, the two performers begin to recount past events of their lives in a receding movement, from the present to the past. They take turns and match their exchange with the movements that were already shown in the exposition. Slowly, it becomes apparent that certain memories trigger specific movements, prompt the switching of sides or direction, and allow the performers to take turns in recounting their chronology. One of the performers starts with the present moment, “now”, followed by h/er immediate past: “Now *in front of* the arrival of the green dress; the arrival of the green dress *in front of* tripping; tripping *in front of* you started talking; you started talking *in front of* waiting; waiting *in front of* arrived to the Kitchen” [my emphasis].<sup>4</sup>

Striking in this retracing of the performer’s past is the overt spatial phrasing of the elements that separates the various actions, or memory items, listed: “in front of”. The score suggests that when looking back at one’s past life, each memory item will obstruct the item that comes after it (or before, if you

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Fig. 2

Performance view, The Kitchen,  
New York, NY, March 2014.

Pictured: R. B. Schlather and Adam  
Weinert.

Photo: Ian Douglas. Picture courtesy  
of Gerard and Kelly



will, since the performers are listing items in reverse chronological order). The phrasing of the memory game already indicates that for Gerard and Kelly the categories of time and space cannot be seen separately from one another. Just as the narrating of memories is done via spatial metaphors, so too these memories motivate the use of space by the performers. The direction in which they walk and specific actions such as “loops” and “movement-memory-snapshots” are bound by the memory items listed and as such *Timelining* gestures towards a relation between the body and memory. The performers not only recount their past lives, but also act out their memories, which, as I argue in this article, challenges the conception of a linear chronology that is generally associated with the narration of memory.

The longer the performers narrate their chronologies, the further back their history is traced: from the immediate past, to a couple of weeks, months, years, and finally back to the moment of their birth, at which point the memory game has reached its end. As the performers take turns recounting their memories, it becomes apparent that these overlap and diverge. The visitor is invited to

trace the narrative which unfolds through the retelling of past experiences which binds the two performers together. Listening to both the performers' storylines, hearing their similarities and diversions, it should become clear that the performers are in some sort of personal and intimate relationship; they are siblings, past or current lovers, mother and daughter, or partners in performing art. These relationships, however, are experienced differently by each party, as is evidenced by the different ways in which each partner recounts similar events.

Parts of the performers' chronologies are prepared in advance, since the performers are instructed to write down a rudimentary timeline of their memories,<sup>5</sup> but most of the retracing of their past is based on improvisation. It is in this improvisation, and the split-second decisions that the performers have to make while playing the game, that we can recognize a destabilizing of assumptions about how relationships are constituted in time. As soon as the other, non-speaking performer recognizes an item on the speaking performer's chronology, s/he is allowed to take over the narration and start recounting h/er own chronology, starting with the item s/he recognized.<sup>6</sup> This is called "linking". The connection between different memory items does not have to be particularly obvious, and the new memory item might appear anywhere in the chronology of the other performer. In this way the performers take turns playing their memory game. Each jumps to different moments on h/er own timeline based on associations s/he makes with h/er partner's recollections. When linking, the performer who continues the list of memory items also turns around and starts walking in the opposite direction, facing the first performer. The jump from one person's timeline to that of the other suggests a break in the unity of the relationship between the performers. Often a new list of items which is prompted through linking will refer to a wholly different event in the performers' lives, or will recount the same event in a wholly different fashion. Walking away from one another serves as a physical reminder that, although the performers are imagined as a couple, the individual experiences of their

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

togetherness might radically differ from one another. The paradox that seems to sit at the centre of a relationship – the experience of being together while remaining apart from one another’s experiences – and the way in which this paradox makes every experience of a relationship always already queer or incompatible with fantasies of normative relationship configurations, are then the central concerns of *Timelining’s* memory game.

*Timelining’s* score opens with the instruction that it “requires two performers involved in some form of an intimate partnership” [emphasis in the original].<sup>7</sup> Ryan Kelly explains the way in which the premise of the performance hinges on the performers’ intimate relationship as follows: “The work began as a performance that Brennan and I did together in an effort to understand how our own intimate relationship – often collapsed by others into the formation ‘a couple’ – was structured similarly and differently by time and memory”.<sup>8</sup> What we see in this performance is a concern with the temporal condition of memory and relationships. That is to say, Gerard and Kelly are interested in how intimate partnerships are structured through social categories of time. For them, a relationship’s shared history is performed as the memory game that is staged in *Timelining*: an exercise that the couple shares between the two of them, but which they also perform for their social environment – in front of an audience. The reiteration of their memories produces a framework that makes the couple intelligible as an essentialized identity: they are lovers, married, siblings, friends, mother and child, and so on.

In the process of making the other intelligible to oneself, one divests the other of h/er ability to determine h/er self-identification. The framing of the couple as a single entity undermines the notion that such relationships are always made up of different takes on the same story. The “collapse” of the individual “into the formation of a couple”, which Kelly addresses, displaces individual identifications by rewriting these into the narrative of the couple. Gerard and Kelly, through their performance, want to explore the tension between the

7 Ibid.

8 Ryan Kelly, e-mail message to the author, 18 November 2014.

social category of the couple and the identifications of the single members who constitute this couple. Instead of envisioning the relationship of the couple as a one-togetherness, or in the image of “two-becoming-one”, their version of relationality is structured as “side-by-side”, overlapping in parts, but still persisting separately.<sup>9</sup> Kelly explains their central concerns with the image of the couple as a single entity as follows:

We also wanted to get away from an idea that all intimate partnerships are made over as “the couple”. So, we engaged many variations on “partnership” to enact our score – a couple, former lovers, siblings, parent/child, and other intimate formations, same-sex and opposite-sex, alike. For us, the queerness was not in the casting, in the content of the relationship (as if only same-sex partnerships can be queer) but in our insistence on a side-by-side structure of intimacy in which each entity retains h/er autonomy within the unit.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the performance starts off with the assumption that queerness is already inherent in the construction of relationships through the discrepancy between the oneness of the couple and the individual autonomy of each person. Queerness, for Gerard and Kelly, is not exclusive to same-sex relationship configurations. Indeed, same-sex relationships do not necessarily manifest a radical non-normative politics, but can advocate for conservative and normative institutions and social structures that are embedded in heteronormative patriarchy. Hence, Kelly feels that “gay marriage advocacy was obscuring a deeply conservative turn in the movement away from the radicalization of intimacies and toward the extension of patriarchal notions of relationality like marriage”.<sup>11</sup>

9 Ibid.

In line with Gerard and Kelly’s assertion, I take queerness to emerge out of the situatedness of libidinal desires – be they same-sex, opposite-sex, or even asexual in constitution – in conjunction with social constraints that seek to

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

repress these very same desires. That is to say, rather than making queerness the domain of same-sex relationships – a move which could be argued to be normative in its own right – I maintain that queerness comes into being at the moment in which individual desires collide with normative social structures that keep these desires in check. Central to the performance of *Timelining* is a resistance against conservative politics that cast both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships in a normative mould associated with reproductive sexuality, which includes the fantasy of the couple as a unity. The reiteration of the couples' histories through the memory game that is central to the performance, combined with embodied memories and the embodiment of temporal categories that are transmitted by the walking patterns, is meant to explore a relationality that goes beyond the erasure of individual experience that prompted by the collapse of this individual into the normative couple.

#### QUEERING NORMATIVITY

Queer theory has devoted considerable energy to thinking about queer experiences of time and the way in which these experiences correspond to non-normative gender identifications and relationship formations in the face of heteropatriarchal discursive practices. Theorists such as Judith Halberstam and Elizabeth Freeman have written important interventions in which they critically engage with normative subjectivity production that is organized by social categories of time. Such interventions are now largely understood as the critical framework of queer temporality, and help us rethink the ways in which the everyday and seemingly commonsensical dimensions of time occlude the discursive practices of public and private time that shape bodies and lived experiences into normative and docile subjects. *Timelining* too can be regarded as a critical reflection of how relationships and their memories are at once normatively produced and queered by their constitution in time. Approaching *Timelining* through the lens of queer temporality allows me to tease out the ways in which the performance casts all relationships as always

already queer, and think through the potentiality of experiencing a relationship as a two-togetherness, rather than a one-togetherness that Gerard and Kelly propose in their performance.

In her book *Time Binds* (2010), Freeman argues that the social construction of time conditions action. Time as a category structures our daily rhythms and behaviour and, in doing so, it produces the subject as a being in time. Our being in time, then, is first and foremost produced socially. This temporal production of subjectivity is tightly bound up with notions of modernity and its paradigm of progress, production, and procreation. Indeed, for Freeman, our experience of time is produced through a discourse that is embedded in structures of capitalism and which dominates both private and public time.<sup>12</sup> In other words, this temporality is an economic, social, and political construction that produces the lived experiences based on which we construct our subjectivity and sense of self.

Following Freeman's analysis of how these different categories each inform time in both different and converging ways, we can begin to understand how we as subjects are compelled to organize our public and private lives in temporal categories and societal norms dictated by economic and political practices. The different temporal modes that Freeman discusses in this respect correspond with capitalist processes of production, accumulation, and movement of capital. The rhythms of our daily lives are structured around labour and the nuclear family, among other things. Societal norms maintain that it is best to go to bed early or to take leisure time only in the weekends: Benjamin Franklin's famous proverb "early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" comes to mind. If one chooses not to follow dominant work rhythms and decides to take time off during the week, one is expected to spend this time productively or, even better, to have it organized by the rhythms of childrearing. The discursive practices that organize our experience of private and public time are centred on the norm of the nuclear,

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

heterosexual, bourgeois family. This is what Freeman calls chrononormativity, as she argues that it reifies heterosexual and patriarchal norms in both the public and the private spheres in order to “organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity”.<sup>13</sup> Chrononormativity, Freeman adds, “suggest[s] that all normativity is a matter of timing, of inculcating particular cultural rhythms into the flesh such that they feel organic”.<sup>14</sup> (Re)productive timing, in all of its connotations of linearity, futurity, and inevitability, then, naturalizes certain cultural behaviours and elevates these as the norm.

The experience of chrononormativity confronts the subject with the imperative of being in sync with the rhythms and flows of a society that is organized around the logic of (re)production, and the prohibition of living at a more syncopated tempo that might decelerate or accelerate in relation to social time. As such, it introduces a set of ethical questions that revolve around the ways in which we organize our private lives in relation to social time: what does it mean to fall in or out of sync with social time? How can alternative kinship and romantic relationships flourish within the constraints of normative temporal structures? In response to such questions, Halberstam commits to a position similar to that of Freeman regarding the production of sexual subjectivity through discursive practices of time. Yet she maintains that within discursive practices of heteropatriarchal reproductive time there remains room to experience time differently; to perform time differently, which allows for a subjectivity production that is non-heteronormative and which deviates from norms of reproductive sex, nuclear families, and forty-hour work weeks. Queer experiences of time can be seen as moments of resistance, as a mode of producing counterhegemonic knowledge.<sup>15</sup> This resistance to normative time, however, is almost exclusively located in those who find themselves already at the margin of heteropatriarchal society. Halberstam’s inquiry into counterhegemonic knowledge centres on queer artists, musicians, and individuals who already organize themselves in alternative romantic or kinship formations. Halberstam situates queerness in opposition to normative time –

<sup>13</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Sex in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Gerard and Kelly’s Kisses” (unpublished manuscript, 23 August 2016), Microsoft Word file.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 159.

running counter to heteropatriarchal strategies of reproduction – while failing to imagine queer temporal experiences within normative subject positions. To recall Kelly: “as if only same-sex partnerships can be queer”.<sup>16</sup>

*Timelining* zooms in on this oversight and implies that queer experiences are also always present in the formation of the normative couple. These experiences make themselves apparent when performers and audience are confronted with the limits of the experiences of their relationship as a unity. Right at the moment in which incongruities, disconnections, and false starts begin to slip into the memory game, their individual experiences are revealed as being radically different from one another. Recalling how each performer jumps back and forth on h/er own chronologies based on associations s/he makes with the memories of h/er partner, or how the same event can be narrated differently, the memory game makes apparent the limits of envisioning a relationship as a normative, reproductive unity. This sense of liminality is already calculated into the score for *Timelining*, as it instructs that “when the outside performer stalls or goes blank, gets lost or confused, s/he stops moving and ends speaking with ‘in front of–’”.<sup>17</sup> If one performer reaches the limit of h/er recollection, if s/he does not know how to further retrace h/er chronology, the other has to take over and find a trigger to link with h/er own chronology.

Halberstam sets queer experiences of being in time categorically apart from heteropatriarchal structuring of time, or chrononormativity. For her the category of queer temporality is diametrically opposed to the reproductive and progressive linearity of heteronormative experiences of time. What she fails to account for, however, is the way in which these experiences of time seem to be inextricably mutually implicated. As many critics of both hetero- and homonormativity have noted, queer identifications do not necessarily amount to the desire for alternative relationship formations or the wish to organize life outside normative structures.<sup>18</sup> Lisa Duggan points out that many of the

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, e-mail message to the author, 18 November 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Gerard and Kelly, “Score for *Timelining*”.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text* 29 (1991), 3-17; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

strategies employed by gay rights organizations campaign for the inclusion of LGBT persons into institutions traditionally associated with reproductive heteronormativity, such as marriage or adoption.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, not all non-queer-identified persons will experience temporality along the patterns of reproductive heteronormativity because of other possible identifications that would limit their access to normative temporal structures or institutions. More often these diverging experiences of time will coexist within the subject, and simultaneously or alternately inform one's temporal sense of being.

*Timelining* takes as one of its starting points the idea that no experiences of relationships are either wholly queer or entirely heteronormative. Kelly's remark that not only same-sex relationships should be considered queer intimates that their concern with experiences of time in the formation of the couple stretches beyond a binary division between heteronormative and queer couples. Instead, for Gerard and Kelly the temporal formation of the relationship is in itself always already queer, which is reflected in the diverse constitutions of the partners they have chosen to perform in the various runs of *Timelining*. The initial run of the performance at The Kitchen in New York featured couples that would not necessarily read as queer or anti-heteronormative. Kinship relations such as mother-daughter or sibling relationships suggest the organizing principle of reproductive time – in the guise of generational differences, childrearing, and sibling rivalry, for example – to structure at least parts of their relationship. Whether considered queer or heteronormative, all couples performing *Timelining* would at times reveal both queer and heteronormative experiences within the narration of their chronologies. The individual memories that were narrated sometimes attested to experiences of reproductive time, while at other times these memories hinted at temporal experiences that were non-linear or counterproductive. Taken together, the memories of each individual performer would also often run counter to the experience that h/er partner narrated, or would shed a different light on how the event was experienced by either one of them.

19 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 45.

Tim Dean makes a similar argument in his reflection of temporal experiences of alternative kinships, which according to him foreground the tension between normative social time and its queer counterpoints. In his ground-breaking work on bareback culture, *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009), Dean explores alternative kinship networks that organize themselves around the transmission of HIV, rather than through the sharing of a genetic pool.<sup>20</sup> For these communities, kinship is not based on a genetic conceptualization of generation, but instead as a generational tie based on viral transmissions. The transmission of the HIV virus between two consenting adults forms a bond in which the receiver of the virus is often cast as the offspring of the giver.<sup>21</sup> Following this analysis, Dean ventures into thinking about how these alternative kinship communities experience their own liminality or finitude. The temporal experiences of these alternative kinships not only dramatize their experience of being out of sync with normative time, but these relationships also expose normative subjectivity to be inherently out of time as well. The tension between generational reproduction and the sense of finitude that is dramatized in the transmission of HIV foregrounds a similar tension in normative romantic and kinship relationships. These too are organized around the tension between reproduction and liminality, as they are caught between a projection into the future and the realization of the finitude of that same future. Reflecting on the Lacanian grammatical tense of future anterior, “what I shall have been”, in which the subject simultaneously anticipates and experiences retrospectively h/er own psychic time, Dean suggests that “we live in time, but not chronologically”.<sup>22</sup> For Dean, then, no subjectivity is experienced in a linear, progressive fashion, but is always experienced within the tension between retrospection and anticipation.

The premise of *Timelining* is to extend the inquiry into temporality beyond the formation of alternative or queer kinships and romantic relationships. Dean’s suggestion that any kinship or subject formation develops non-chronologically echoes Gerard and Kelly’s move away from the assumption that normative

20 Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 84-96.

21 *Ibid.*, 85.

22 Tim Dean, “Bareback Time,” in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 84.

relationship formations are always structured by chrononormativity. Instead, *Timelining* exposes the formation of a relationship, whether heteropatriarchal or alternative, as always being wrapped up in tensions between temporal experiences of reproduction and liminality, future and past, public and private, social and individual, and unity and two-togetherness. The stage onto which these tensions are dramatized is the memory game that the performers play, yet the memories that are recounted in this game cannot be contained within the personal narratives of the performers. Instead, these memories become embodied as they trigger certain actions and movements in the performers. These embodied memories, in return, disrupt the linearity through which the initial chronology is narrated, allowing for a reframing of the temporal experiences that constitute the relationship between the performers.

#### EMBODIED DISRUPTIONS

The body as auxiliary to knowledge transmission plays an important role in the memory game of *Timelining* and, in effect, in the performance's departure point of the couple as a two-togetherness. Honing in on the physical dimension of *Timelining's* memory game, I claim that the dramatization of the memory through its bodily movements shows how for Gerard and Kelly queer temporal experiences of a relationship manifest themselves through the ways in which the couple's two bodies relate to one another. Diana Taylor, in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), discusses the transmission of embodied practices in performance as an epistemology for cultural knowledge. She argues that within the discourse of modernity, the privileging of written knowledge over embodied memory has marginalized epistemologies that are centred on bodily experiences.<sup>23</sup> For Taylor, the repertoire of group and individual performances alike produces a knowledge that counters the hegemony of normative practices of modernity's epistemologies. So too in *Timelining* we see the staging of embodied memory through a scenario of movements, bodily acts, and positions in space. The transmission of bodily knowledge unfolds on

<sup>23</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 17.

multiple levels. For example, the circular walking resembles a tracing back and forth of time on a clock. The rhythm of the performers' movements is structured by their memory as the score gives several directives for specific movements that are triggered by certain memories or associations that the performers make. These specific movements – linking, looping and movement-memory-snapshots – each break away from the linearity of the narrated memory game, as we have seen already when the linking performer starts to walk in the opposite direction of h/er partner:

In a split-second decision, s/he may decide to pivot and speak that item at the moment h/er partner repeats it. At this point, the performer who is **linking** starts speaking h/er own **chronology** departing from that item and moving in the opposite sense of the circle [emphasis in the original].<sup>24</sup>

As noted earlier, the movement of linking dramatizes the fact that similar events are experienced differently by the performers. Sudden disruptions of the chronology open into new memories that originate from different parts of either performer's timeline, suggesting that the memories with which we construct the narratives of our past lives do not follow a linear pattern either. Linking also prompts other actions that the performers can decide to engage in. It raises the occasion for movement-memory-snapshots or loops, two devices that further dramatize the disruption of the linear flow of the performers' chronologies. It is important to note that these actions are initiated by the performer who is not recounting h/er chronology. The dynamic within the relationship depends on the interaction between both partners, but this interaction always bears the mark of disruption and uncertainty. In an improvised snap decision, one performer can disrupt the linear flow of h/er partner's history, but without doing so, there would be no relationship to speak of in the first place.

<sup>24</sup> Gerard and Kelly, "Score for *Timelining*".

The first of the two actions that can be prompted by linking, the movement-memory-snapshot (Fig. 3),<sup>25</sup> consists of memories that are remembered through a combination of bodily movements and spoken narratives, and can occur after the performers join again during their linking. One of the performers halts to make gestures and movements that s/he associates with a specific item on h/er chronology. Here, memory is acted out as embodied practice. While one performer drops into a movement-memory-snapshot, the other performer controls the pace of this movement by speeding up, slowing down, or halting. Once the performers are reunited, they continue to walk in a circle together. The other performer might decide to drop into a movement-memory-snapshot as well, inspired by the embodied memories of h/er fellow performer. These embodied memories unfold through a heightened sense of co-dependence. Simultaneously, these movements also stress how the performers exist separately within the framework of the couple, for the movement-memory-snapshot highlights the individuality of such embodied memories.

25 Ibid.



Fig. 3  
 Performance view, Solomon R.  
 Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
 NY, July 2015.  
 Pictured: Heather McGhee and  
 Hassan Christopher.  
 Photo: Zac Spears. Picture courtesy  
 of Gerard and Kelly

A final staging of embodied memory is what the score calls a loop, which can also happen while linking.<sup>26</sup> The performer who loops peels off from the circle and starts circling on h/er own on the spot. While doing this, s/he lists a mini-chronology of specific items, for instance, every place s/he has lived or every romantic relationship s/he has had. The loop continues until the other performer has rejoined the first, and until this happens the looping performer just repeats h/er mini-chronology. These three specific actions have in common that they tear into the linearity of the narrated memory game. While usually the performers would list items from their chronology in a backwards chronological order – “now in front of ...” – each of these actions disrupts the linear flow and introduces a different experience of time: experiences that jump back and forth in time, as is the case when linking; a halting, slowing down, or speeding up of time when engaged in a movement-memory-snapshot; or time as circular and repetitive in the case of a loop. These disruptions in the linearity of the performance are further dramatized by the performers breaking away from one another.

Commenting on a series of different performance pieces by Gerard and Kelly, Freeman identifies a strategy in their choreography with which they break down and denaturalize categories that make up the normative behaviour within romantic partnerships. “As a choreographed behavior, sex can be broken down into components that can be reshuffled and rearranged, in a productive alienation that liberates it from linearity, simultaneity, reciprocity, and organicity.”<sup>27</sup> One of these performances, entitled *Reusable Parts/ Endless Love* (2011) is a potentially infinite loop of performers describing the movements of a kiss, while other performers move to these descriptions as if these were in fact instructions for a kiss. Because the moving performers have to negotiate who performs which action, the result of the performance is that the movements separate the performers instead of bringing them together in the union of a kiss. As with *Timelining*, in this piece too, “two don’t become one”.<sup>28</sup>

26 Ibid.

27 Freeman, “Sex in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Gerard and Kelly’s Kisses”.

28 Ibid.

Breaking down memories into discrete items on a performer's chronology, while enabling h/er to jump back and forth, linger on the spot, or change direction, creates a similar effect in *Timelining* to that recognized by Freeman in *Reusable Parts/Endless Love*. We can identify a resistance against the linearity of history that constitutes the normative relationship formation. By reshuffling memory items through physical interventions, *Timelining* problematizes the assumption that relationships are constituted in chrononormative, or linear time. The memories enacted are inextricably bound together, constituting the framework of the couple, but also reproduce individual experiences. The normative one-togetherness in which the couple is usually situated transforms into a queer two-togetherness: making the couple intelligible as such, without forfeiting the self-identification of the members that constitute this couple. Through this performance, then, Gerard and Kelly ask their audience to rethink the relationship of the performers and, by extension, their own relationships as well. These are no longer defined in terms of progress or a movement forward, but in different, queer ways. An imagining of relationships as breaking out of linear and normative time enables our thinking of queer relationality as a mode of producing counterhegemonic knowledge.

#### CONCLUSION: SCRIPTED ANARCHY

What this analysis aims to show is that the cultural work of *Timelining* hinges on a tension that Gerard and Kelly identify as inherent to intimate relationships. The problematic collapse of individual experiences into shared memories, which expresses itself in the form of incongruous recollections and reimagined personal histories, is foregrounded in the capricious memory game that the performers play while tracing back their own chronologies. Jumping back and forth through time, the performers time and again map out new itineraries that constitute their shared histories. With each repetition of the performance, the narrative of their chronology changes slightly. Different items in one's chronology might trigger further different responses and recollections in the

other's chronology, and vice versa. The triggers do not necessarily have to correspond, as indicated by the score for *Timelining*:

This time, s/he does not begin with “Now” but instead finds a **trigger** where the other left off to something in h/er own **chronology**. For instance, the other may have left off saying something about a phone call with h/er mother. This performer will begin with an item in the **chronology** that is about a mother, a phone call, etc. The association need not be perfectly clear and can jump the performer in time to any point in h/er **chronology** [emphasis in the original].<sup>29</sup>

The improvisation element that supports the memory game ensures that no two performances trace the exact same chronology. When an item in one's chronology triggers a memory for h/er partner, the latter has to act on a split-second decision if s/he wants to introduce a link, movement-memory-snapshot, or loop into h/er memory game. The game, then, seems to allow for great freedom on the performers' behalf. Both performers can continuously remap and reconstitute their intimate relationship, which comes to be understood not as a monolithic entity in which individual experiences are subsumed by projections of shared memories, but as a construction that has to be constantly rebuilt and renegotiated. As is the case with Freeman's reading of the sex act in *Endless Love/Reusable Parts*,<sup>29</sup> so too does *Timelining* offer versions of intimate relationships that are fragmented by nature and only start to signify as 'relationship' once their chronologies are reconstructed as narratives time and again. The potential for counterhegemonic knowledge production lies in this reframing of cultural assumptions and the social dimensions of self-identification that the score for *Timelining* has built for the individual performers, while at the same time acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness of their shared experiences.

<sup>29</sup> Gerard and Kelly, “Score for *Timelining*”.

As a final remark, however, I want to briefly draw attention to yet another tension, this time at the heart of the score for *Timelining* itself. While the performance allows for a substantial amount of improvisation and play to produce a sense of freedom in the performers, and to place them at the centre of the knowledge production of the performance, we cannot help but notice that while reading the score for the performance, it often comes across as stringent and overly regulated. While the score leaves its performers much freedom in choosing the itinerary of their own chronology, it simultaneously holds them to a very strict and limited set of movements and interactions. The score prescribes the particular instances in which performers should change lanes or directions and step into movement-memory-snapshots or loops, while prohibiting these very same movements in other situations. The scriptedness of the movements seems to be at odds with the unpredictable quality of the memory game. However, I argue that the seeming incongruity between the performance's attempt to produce counterhegemonic knowledge, and the means with which it arrives at doing so, might actually be one of the most important lessons we can draw from *Timelining*. For although the limitations that the score imposes seem to be in tension with the practice of counterhegemonic knowledge production, we should bear in mind that the score for *Timelining* is composed to produce a specific effect: the reframing of the cultural understanding of intimate relationships. Without a certain set of rules to guide the performers through the memory game that forms the basis for *Timelining*, the performance might in fact end up anywhere. To be sure, this paradox at the heart of *Timelining* could in itself provide some interesting insights, but it would not necessarily result in counterhegemonic knowledge as such. For counterhegemonic knowledge to be productive, we must take into account the context in which it is produced and which dominant discursive practices this knowledge production challenges. The score for *Timelining* ensures that it becomes clear to which cultural practices the performers' memory game responds. The production of counterhegemonic knowledge, then, should not be understood as a free-for-all and anarchistic practice.

Rather, it takes on the dominant discourse and tears at its margins; it unravels the way hegemonic discursive practices produce cultural knowledge, and it exposes the arbitrary and constructed nature of these knowledges.<sup>30</sup>

30 I would like to thank Ryan Kelly for his elaborate correspondence and for sharing the score for *Timelining* with me. His and Brennan Gerard's kindness and generosity have been invaluable to my research. I also wish to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Freeman, who did not hesitate one second to share her unpublished manuscript about Gerard and Kelly's work with me and generously gave me permission to cite it. Finally, I could not have written this piece without my friend James Fry. After all, he introduced me to the work of Gerard and Kelly in the first place.

Looi van Kessel is a PhD researcher at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS). His research focuses on the writing of James Purdy, and in particular on the ways his work engages with rhetorical strategies of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Looi has also taught courses in Cultural Studies and North American culture in the International Studies Bachelor's degree program at Leiden University. His recent publications include "Organizing Cultuur?Barbaar!: Some Problems of Creating Concepts through Art," in *Barbarism Revisited*, ed. Maria Boletsi and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2015); and "Digital Drag: Queer Potentiality in the Age of Digital Television," in *Queer TV in the 21st Century*, ed. Kylo-Patrick R. Hart (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016).



Freedom Flowers Project  
Manuel Salvisberg and Ai Weiwei  
2014/15  
*Bomb and urn*  
Photo: Annette Dubois – CC BY-NC 2.0



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands