

PINK FLOYD'S *TIME*: AN AURAL NARRATIVE THAT EXPLORES ASPECTS OF TIME THROUGH LYRICS AND THE DISRUPTION OF MUSIC MEMORY.

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Abstract

Reading progressive English band Pink Floyd's song Time as an aural narrative is an immersive exercise that draws the listener into a direct confrontation and encounter with calibrations, notions and the impact of time. From concept to form, Time defines displays and involves one with the idea of Time. Released in the US in 1974, Time is a fascinating intersection of concept, performance and lyrical / musical composition. The track is one among the pioneering ones, in many senses in recording and broadcasting history having redefined radio broadcast time beyond the standard 3 minutes afforded to popular music tracks which was the commercially and preferred listener span. The album version extends to 6.52 minutes.

Pink Floyd, formed in 1965, is a band venerable for its exploration of atypical themes through their lyrics and aural elements. They were especially noted for a wide range of experimentation with sound as a narrative element in their songs. They are credited for playing a key role in the evolution of 'Progressive Rock' as a genre. They ascribed several characteristics of a progressive rock piece by successfully engaging with music as a means to create texts, breaking standard song structures and extended compositions. Their compositions included the creation of a sense of space through atmospheric elements of meticulous guitar tones, keyboard and vocal arrangements, and strategically constructed rhythm sections. Their lyrics explored philosophical themes in a careful manner. Pink Floyd is also credited for popularizing the idea of a concept album. A concept album is a collection of tracks that contribute to a larger, single narrative. In concept albums, each consecutive song acts as a supplementary narrative, musically and thematically to form a complete story. This paper focuses on Pink Floyd's song, 'Time', which forms the third track of their renowned concept album, Dark Side of The Moon.

The song uses performance and composition to capture the many aspects and by products of time: from scientific concepts of time, to antiquity and impatience as effects of time as well as movement and calibration as time's imprints. The lyrics capture the dimensional aspect of Time;

first the sun is central to movement (Chronos) and then man is given centrality (Kairos) thus engaging with the relativity of time and movement.

Musically the band experiments with unusual time signatures, rhythmic structures and elaborate compositions normalising them in such a way that the listener readjusts one's conventional understanding of time and time frames. Time is shortened and expanded, thus experimenting with the listeners' aural perceptions.

The song, Time then performs as a metanarrative that through lyric, sound and performance is self reflexive and explores various ideas and manifestations of time.

Key Terms: *Aurality , aural narrative , metanarrative , self-reflexivity, aspects of Time*

Composition and Recording: Time-bound Techniques that create a timeless piece

Pink Floyd's song, 'Time' is a composition of several strands of the story, aural and verbal, that complement and conflate the narrative. The song negotiates the concept of time and time itself as it progresses. Towards the end of the song, David Gilmour sings "the time is gone, the song is over, thought I'd something more to say", immediately establishing a constraint of time for a song that talks of the nature of time. In this context, there is a compositional duality at play where time controls the song and the song exerts control over the concept of time.

Composers have noticed that a general thought that arises in musicians while writing is how an audience or an imaginary audience would respond to a particular creation, however Pink Floyd's songwriting was not always constrained by such considerations and this allowed them the scope to break the 3 minute barrier imposed by the conventions of broadcast time on radio. Pink Floyd's *Time* stands at 6 minutes and 52 seconds and its album (Dark Side of The Moon) remained on the charts for a record-breaking 741 weeks. People continue to think about it even when there's nothing more for the creator to say, moving beyond textual time.

Reading Sonic Indices and Sonic Scenes in the composition of *Time*

The song begins with the muffled ticking of a clock, panned from the right ear to the left. This muffled ticking sounds akin to running footsteps; when it reaches the extreme end of the left ear, the ticking settles down, before it halts. Immediately, a higher pitched ticking begins to fade in. When this becomes clearer, one notices that two clocks are working in syncopation to produce a satisfying rhythm. Just when the listener is tricked into a sense of calm by this rhythm, a loud alarm ring immediately follows. Each of these sound bytes are man made sonic indices which are indicators of the notion of the passage of time . These sonic indices combine sequentially to form the sonic scene that follows thereby creating ultimately an auditory episode . The song is made up of three such auditory episodes : the overture of clock and pulse sonic indices ,leading into a lyric supported narrative and ending on a note of reverie .

Soon, several alarm clocks and gongs ring and chime in all directions, creating a sense of chaos. However, this sense of chaos follows a recurring polyrhythm which is resolved by the first

alarm clock fading out with two bells ringing in complementary notes to each other. This section fiddles with music memory as one is inevitably lost in the chaos of clashing sounds, with no sense of temporal fixity to latch onto for order, and there is no sense of time, in effect. The only way one can acquire a sense of cohesion is if they fixate on any particular sound in the recurring rhythm; the total effect that the section has is doubtless creating a jarring atmosphere, forcing the listener to consciously experience and confront the only tangible representation of calibrated time known to humans - clocks or timepieces. The listener thus immediately comes face to face with time as a calibrated yet chaotic experience, one that creates an illusory sense of order for man, and yet is in its essence is grounded in fluid, unbound play.

The alarm clock, having served its purpose of interpellating the listener into a conscious confrontation of time soon fades away, and gives way to a metronomic percussive pulse, insistently plugging away at 120 BPM. This is accompanied by a constant bass drum pattern, beating at halftime of the ticking. This is quite obviously reminiscent of the most organic and primitive experience of time for man, the heartbeat and the human pulse. The slow, tolling bell, which was serving a similar purpose in the initial section stays for longer than the alarm clock, and exists simultaneously with the pulse for a few seconds. This particular section can be seen as a representation of the passage of time; with the frantic, insistent pulse being the direct indicator of the same, and the bell that exists in simultaneity for a few seconds being the symbol of doom and mortality, and of the inevitable nature of one's temporal and temporary existence.

The instruments then kick in - a keyboard, a bass and the rototoms. This section has the same two chords being played after every four bars, with Richard Wright's keys and Nick Mason's rototoms gradually covering more and more space with their fills. The section feels almost monotonous in its repetition thanks to its continuous alternating between the same chords for more than a minute at extensively spaced out intervals; and as a result seems to go on forever. It creates the temporal experience of impatience and keeps the listener waiting expectantly for a change or a resolution. This effect of impatience it creates due to the insistent repetition makes time as experienced in this entire section feels much longer than it actually is in the empirical sense.

Once the repetitive element is broken by a change in the chord progression, it immediately creates a sense of expectation, and at the end of the progression's cycle, the expected release is encountered; a short drum-fill leads into the verse of the song.

The entire introduction section creates in aural form what the lyrics will convey over the course of the song; that one tends to normalize the experience of time, finds it to be monotonous enough to repress its experience into the subconscious, and only consciously experiences it in hoping for it to pass by faster in order to kill the monotony. However, when the monotony does pass, one realizes that the very monotony is what the experience of time itself is.

Similar thoughts were opined by the lyricist, Roger Waters in a 1982 interview when asked about the song:

"I spent an awful lot of my life — until I was about twenty-eight — waiting for my life to start. I thought that at some point I would turn from a chrysalis into a butterfly that my real life would begin. So if I had that bit of my life to live again, I would rather live the years between eighteen and twenty-eight knowing that that was it, that nothing was suddenly going to happen — that it was happening all the time. Time passes, and you are what you are, you do what you do."

- Roger Waters to Rolling Stone, (Waters, 1982)

A lot of the sonic indices at the introduction of the song capture these very thoughts of Waters.

- The ticking that sounds like footsteps in the beginning immediately establishes that time is in effect, “running away”, and denotes its inevitable passage.
- The rhythmic, calm ticking before the chaos portrays how one experiences time primarily as a wait for the future. Perception of time is frequently beyond the present and often there is a wait’ for something great to come along. It is hard to focus on the moment, the here and now, as Waters explains in the interview
- The chaos comes about as multiple alarm clocks ring simultaneously, breaking the conventional chronological linear perception of time. Clocks are a calibration of time and this part aims to portray that time is like a landscape where every point of time occurs, has occurred and will occur when it does.

This section of the clock sounds was a quadraphonic sound experiment by Pink Floyd's record engineer, Alan Parsons. Quadraphonic sound is that which enters from four directions - left, right, back, front. Parsons recorded each clock individually in an antiques store. The fact that mechanical clocks are perceived as antique is also fascinating, because something as timeless as time is assigned an aesthetic value as well, through clocks.

This experiment by Alan Parsons took place in a time that was devoid of the vast assemblage of digital samples that are used frequently in recording in the current era. This meant that each aural element had to be recorded separately. Further, the lack of digital recording equipment meant that, Pink Floyd recorded their songs on tape. This rigidified their process. These facts cohesively ascertain the anachronistic value of the song. This is owing to the fact that the aesthetic value would be largely belittled because of the convenience of the sample library. However, samples have a disadvantage of their own. Artists are required to compromise by using a sound that is closest to their requirements. Bands like Pink Floyd had the opportunity to match exactly what they were looking for. Moreover, in times when quadraphonic sound was unevolved, the use of the limited technology elevated the impact of the song. This technique of recording itself by virtue of being outmoded imbues an anachronistic value to the piece.

As the song progresses, the band still plays with time - in this case musical time. The verse of the song is gestaltic as the rhythmic patterns of the two guitars, the bass, and the drums are all separate from each other, yet complementary to create a greater, unified whole. The drums are

the only element, which keep a constant backbeat while Waters' bass lines constantly jump in and around the upbeats and downbeats of the bars. The panned rhythm guitar does much of the same, playing around with the conventional upbeat/downbeat strum pattern. Another guitar constantly fills in other pockets of time that are created by the song, with constantly changing guitar fills.

The final section of the song reprises into an earlier song on the album - Breathe. The song noticeably slows down by 8 bpm on the way to the reprise. The slowing down of the tempo, and the sonic and spatial shift from a harmonic and rhythmic fullness to a calm, serene Shambala-like nothingness creates a fascinating aural experience of slow, almost non-existent time. The end of the song is representative of the end of time as experienced by man - a blissful, timeless limbo. What began as the rude confrontation of the listener with calibrated time in the form of chaotic, jarring clock sounds, ends with a serene lulling experience of timelessness.

The song lilts in the A major scale, following the Dorian mode. The use of the Dorian mode colours the song with a mystifying progression, apt to describe the nature of time. The guitars and bass share several sections where they complete each other to form exciting chords. For example, in the bridge begins with an F#m chord on the guitars, while the bass holds down a D, forming the D major seventh. In the first bridge, the backing vocals that sing the "oohs" and "aahs" are processed to sound fluid. This aural choice grasps the listener's attention, and forms a perplexing, yet balanced experience. This seems to represent the lyrics of this bridge where it strikes a sense of realisation about the passage of time. The harmonies lull the listener's senses by producing a calming and tensed effect simultaneously.

Lyrics as Verbal Scaffolding

Time in the tradition of fine poetry reads like a seamless, smooth narrative, reflective and lacking in any kind of histrionics. The apparent simplicity belies the complexity of verbal structure that employ aural, musical and lyrical devices and arrangements much like the seeming simplicity of a clock face that covers the complex underlying clockwork mechanism of interlocking, whirring gears and cogwheels that are often referred to, simply, as movement.

This brings one to the interesting aspect of the 'movement' or calibration of Time.

Time is measured through movement, of shadows, of sound, of material objects. The calibration is often shaped by the impact and imprint this passage.

The lyric reinforces the auralty by using words like ticking, kicking, fritter, words which are entirely or partially onomatopoeic, in that they embody the sound of the action. The words by phonetic structure and syllabic arrangement recall the sound of the clock.

'Fritter' itself captures the slowing down of the unwinding of the tightly wound clock spring.

While the initial sound-bytes of clocks and alarms, chiming and ticking are mechanical and extraneous, the heartbeats and implied footsteps channel the sound into the body ... heartbeats and footsteps being time's measurement located on and by the body.

'Waste', 'waiting' and 'tired' are notions that are connotative of the passage of time, mostly unproductive and therefore lacking in commercial and worldly value, though in terms of

composition, these are spaces of reflection and offset the frenzy of socialized, functional living. These words are indicative of the performativity of time.

Gilmour delivers hard hitting truths about the nature of time:

“And then one day you find ten years have got behind you / No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun.”

While this is an ominous reminder of the irreversible finality of the passage of time the fascinating aspect of these lines is the implicit cyclic movement of time.

"So you run and you run to catch up with the sun but it's sinking

Racing around to come up behind you again.

The sun is the same in a relative way but you're older,

Shorter of breath and one day closer to death."

Every year is getting shorter never seem to find the time.(Waters, 1974)

The lines cited above invoke the cosmic passage of time that is understood in the rotation and revolution of the earth that mark time in human life as days and years. Running to catch up with the sun evokes the breathless circadian rhythms. This control that time exerts over behaviour is set against the larger, ponderous revolution that presides over the years inevitably ushering us ‘one day closer to death’ and that the body therefore responds to this in the ‘shortness of breath’.

The mechanical clock face, designed in a circular shape, tells time through the steady, rhythmic ticking of the movement of the hands that are fixed at the circle’s centre. The movement is repetitive and accurate, much like the fixed point that the heliocentric structure of the universe supports .Harmony in the universe is achieved through the ‘music of the spheres’ or the rhythmic, steady movement of the planets on their own axis and around the sun. All this majesty of motion and cosmic choreography is captured in the lines:

So, you run and you run to catch up with the sun but it's sinking

Racing around to come up behind you again.

The sun is the same in a relative way but you're older (Waters,1974).

These lines also evoke the mythic presence of Chronos and Kairos (Tempus), cosmic and personal manifestations of time in pre-Socratic memory. The image of running, an act of speed, indicates agency and the seizing of the moment (yes, carpe diem) are in keeping with representations of personal time or Kairos. The sun remains fixed, controlling through centripetal force the circular orbit of the planets. If the sun appears to change over the course of the day it is a mere sleight of relative positionality, that is, one’s point of view defines the image of the sun over different times of the day. The earlier line indicating that you are young and life is long is relative too.

Plans that either come to naught or half a page of scribbled lines

Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way

The time is gone, the song is over,

Thought I'd something more to say.(Waters, 1974)

The final reverie that constructs the open spaces of the English countryside is again measured out through the tolling of the iron bell calling the faithful to the time defined rituals of worship as opposed to faith and spirituality, which are beyond time's constraints.

It's good to warm my bones

Beside the fire

Far away

Across the field

Tolling on the iron bell

Calls the faithful to their knees

To hear the softly spoken magic spell... (Waters, 1974)

The visual pans out to the open spaces and then swings into the close focus of the cottage fireside thus establishing a chronotope (intersection of time and space in a narrative) that is at once momentary and timeless as the song ends on a note of hushed sibilance 'To hear the softly spoken magic spell...'

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