1-1-2016

'Being in Slow Time' Library Exhibit Guide

Repository Citation

http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/bellarmineforum2016_resources/13

This Brochure is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Resources by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.
"Being and Slow Time" is a designated "Slow Time Zone" created in conjunction with the 2016 Bellarmine Forum, the LMU Common Book, and SLOW LMU. This brochure includes the placards for each display of the exhibition, along with "Slow Time Exercises" associated with them. These exercises were designed as class assignments; they may be responded to contemplatively rather than in writing. Although familiarity with A Tale for the Time Being will enrich your experience, the exhibition can be enjoyed fully without having read the book. We thank you for making time to visit, and welcome your comments and questions (Paul.Harris@lmu.edu).

Paul Harris (Professor of English, Co-Director, Bellarmine Forum)  
Richard Turner (Bellarmine Forum Artist-in-Residence)
INTRODUCTION

Playing off of Martin Heidegger's monumental tome *Being and Time*, this exhibition signals a shift from Heidegger's phenomenological, human-centered analysis of time to an ecological, earth-centered vision in which human and natural histories have become inextricably entwined.

The title *A Tale for the Time Being* alludes to Zen master Dōgen's teaching that "time itself is being, and all being is time." All existing things are time beings, from humans to trees to stones to mountains to earth. Author Ruth Ozeki extrapolates this vision into a complex textual ecology of interacting temporalities in which human lives collide with other time beings including jellyfish, animals, birds, floating garbage patches, oceanic gyres, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Her narrative does not depict or contain these planetary time beings as separate entities; tides, waves, and other non-human time beings become purveyors of narrative and active narrative participants.

METHOD

The exhibition offers a creative admixture rather than a critical analysis of *A Tale for the Time Being*. The novel provides a set of primary elements that are incorporated in the various displays in a variety of ways. Sifting through a book to identify suggestive things, images, and ideas for possible inclusion in installations changes how a text is viewed. The novel is not read as a narrative but looked at as a cabinet of curiosities. Selected textual images, things, or ideas become found objects, for which appropriate material expression must then be found. Extending the book into installations unfolds in different ways, from simple correlations (an object represents something named in the text) to conceptual extrapolations (imagining a three-dimensional visualization of philosophical notions). Treating a book as a curiosity cabinet initiates a process that culminates in library display cases and bookshelves turning into curiosity cabinets of a contemporary kind.

THEME

The exhibition theme of ecological slow time is explored through traditional and contemporary stone displays. Viewing stones invite different encounters with rocks, from an aesthetic gaze grounded in stillness and contemplation to a visceral, visual-tactile feeling for geological processes. Balanced stones create a contrast between precarious ephemerality and the deep time of rocks. Stacking stones is an increasingly popular form of passing meditative slow time; interested parties are invited to balance rocks in The Displacement Garden (next to Laband Art Gallery).

CONTEXT

Setting imposing stones in Hannon Library without imposing on the setting is accomplished by combining lithic landscapes and library elements in composite compositions. Bookshelves become tidal shelves; book stacks merge with stone stacks; book spines transposed into poems manifest as graphic strata forming 'sedimental stories.' This synthetic method connects complementary forms of slow time: the slow time of reading, the calm study space of the library, the ideal of the scholarly life on one side; the slow time of stones, the eons of geology, the contemplation of deep time on the other side.
BEACH READING  (ground floor entrance vitrine)
Cat, whale, bookspine poem, jellyfish, foam, text, sand, suiban

Just as the novel is spurred by a diary found on the beach, the exhibition itinerary is initiated by a text buried in sand. Stacked books tell a layered story, signaling a shift from Heidegger's *Being and Time* to Ozeki's slow time grounded in a Pacific Rim ecology where polystyrenes and plastics mingle with sea creatures.

TABLE OF TEXT MESSAGES  (second floor, near fireplace)
Foam letters (cutouts from stairwell palindromes)

A place where letters meet up in new combinations. Make a message and post it to your favorite social media channels using the hashtag, #SlowLMU.
"Up, Down, Same Thing" (hanging in stairwell)
Styrofoam, palindromes

WASITACATISAW (was it a cat I saw)
NOWIEMITTIMEIWON (now I emit time I won)

"Up, Down, Same Thing" is Buddhist nun Jiko's koan-like comment while watching surfers. The paradoxical logic that defies linear thinking finds a linguistic analogy in palindromes (back/forth, same thing). Palindromes align with the space (in the stairwell, "up, down, same thing") and concept of slow time (linear flows of language and time are arrested as they transform into repeating loops or cycles). Styrofoam pieces suspended in the virtual vortex of the spiraling stairwell evoke the plastic garbage patches stuck in calm spaces within the oceanic gyres, a central motif in *A Tale for the Time Being*.

Ozeki's novel features searches of many kinds, including Ruth's search for Nao, Ruth and Oliver's search for a lost cat, and Proust's search for lost time. The palindromes reference the missing pet and Proust's victory through writing over lost time. "Now I emit time I won" might be imagined as the subsequent sentence he uttered after famously saying, on finishing his 15 years-eight volumes-3,031 page search for lost time, "Now I can die."

**Slow time exercise for this display:**

Make the cumbersome climb a walking meditation: focus on the sole of your foot as you walk the stairs (up, down, same thing); each step, pause, breathe, relax. Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "When you walk, arrive with every step. That is walking meditation. There is nothing else to it." Also: "To live in the present moment is a miracle…. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now." (From *How to Walk*; contact Paul Harris to consult a copy.)
THE CABINET OF ACCUMULATED VOID (3rd floor)

Air, Styrofoam, Chinese 'scholar rocks.'

Named after the Pavilion of Accumulated Void in the Master-of-Nets Garden in Suzhou, China, the cabinet uses Chinese scholar rocks to embody the notion that "emptiness is form." In the aesthetics developed around these stones, desirable characteristics included *tou* ('foraminate structure,' having multiple holes and openings). The forms of these elegant rocks, displayed as if floating in air, are defined by their emptiness. Emptiness and form arise in mutual dependency in the stones, as they do in the Heart Sutra, a Buddhist text referenced in *A Tale for the Time Being* from which the mantra "emptiness is form/form is emptiness" is derived.

**Chinese Stones Notes** (Tom Elias)

Unusual stones were appreciated by the literati in Imperial China for over 1,000 years. Stones like these were often displayed on desks in a scholar's study. Daoists believed that *qi*, the energy infusing all natural phenomena (including humans), was especially concentrated in rocks; stones were called 'the bones of the earth'. Stones with fantastic, abstract forms were the most valued.

**Upper left: Taihu stone**

This stone from Jiangsu province was formed and polished by waves in Lake Tai for thousands of years.

**Lower left: Linglong stone (vertical)**

“Linglong” may be translated as graceful and delicate. The stone originated in the mountains in the southern province of Guangxi.

**Lower right: Linglong stone (horizontal)**

This small, skeleton-like stone from Guangxi province can represent the entire world—heaven and earth.

*On loan from the collection of Tom Elias and Hiromi Nakaoji.*
**Slow time exercises for this display:**

1. Read the passage in *A Tale for the Time Being* on Form is emptiness/emptiness is form, pp. 106-07.
2. Consider any associations you have around the phrase "emptiness is form." If you are writing, free-write for 5 minutes about the phrase.
3. Examine the stones in the cabinet. For each stone:
   a. Look at the stone for 5 minutes; see it from different distances and angles.
   b. Write an objective description of the stone so that someone who has not seen it could visualize it. Describe its size, form, color, and texture.
   c. Describe the "spirit" of the stone—what kind of affect, vibe, feeling, presence does it have? If you were to name the stone, what would you call it?
   d. What thoughts did the stone provoke as you looked at it and write about it?
4. After you have completed this exercise for all three stones, then write about "emptiness is form" in relation to the Cabinet exhibit as a whole. What links do you see? How do the stones and exhibit make you think about "emptiness is form"?
5. Write a 100 – 250 word creative or critical composition about "emptiness is form."
6. Take photos of the stones and write a message about them or give them your names; post them to your favorite social media channels using the hashtag, #SlowLMU.

For more resources:

- Read the [Heart Sutra](#) and the explication of it at the link.
- Read about [Chinese stones](#)
- Read about Linglong stones at [VSANA](#) (Viewing Stone Association of North America) website.
THE CABINET OF QUANTUM FOAM  (3rd floor)

Space-time, foam, stone.

The phrase "form is emptiness," extracted from its original Buddhist context, resonates interestingly with the concept of quantum foam theorized in contemporary cosmology. Quantum gravity models predict that space-time is a foaming void where infinitesimal dimensions and particles unfurl and vanish at virtually infinite speeds, rendering them impossible to observe directly. This theory is given visual form as porous petric matter emerging from a sea of packing foam. Weighty tomes of Styrofoam, perhaps suturing the Heart Sutra to quantum physics, are bookended by foam stones of nearly zero mass.

Slow time exercises for this display:

1. In A Tale for the Time Being, read p. 30 about time being and Appendix A on Zen Moments and Appendix B on Quantum Mechanics.
2. Make a word cluster of associations around the phrase "form is emptiness." Free-write for 5 minutes about the phrase.
3. Look at the exhibit for 5 minutes, free-writing any impressions and associations.
4. Look at the stone closely and then:
   a. Write an objective description of the stone so that someone who has not seen it could visualize it. Describe its size, form, color, and texture.
   b. Describe the "spirit" of the stone—what kind of affect, vibe, feeling, presence does it have? If you were to name the stone, what would you call it?
   c. What thoughts did the stone provoke as you looked at it and write about it?
5. Watch this short video on quantum foam from NASA.
6. Write a brief paragraph relating the cabinet exhibit and the concept of quantum foam.
7. Write a creative or critical composition expressing your vision of "form is emptiness," drawing on any materials you want, or just from your own thinking.
8. Take photos of the exhibit and write a message about them; post them to your favorite social media channels using the hashtag, #SlowLMU.
TIDAL SHELVES (3rd floor; left set of shelves in photo)
Found objects, beachcombed materials.

The objects found in this display are found in *A Tale for the Time Being*, a novel founded on a found object (Nao's diary). Bookcases become "tidal shelves," referencing the prominent motif of things washed up onto beaches by tides and waves. Just as the found object initiates a search process in the novel, the found objects here invite a scavenger hunt: identify the objects in these shelves, and find them in the novel.

**Slow time exercise for this display:**

**Scavenger Hunt**

The found objects in the Tidal Shelf are intended to initiate a scavenger hunt through the pages of Ruth Ozeki’s novel *A Tale for the Time Being*. Some of the objects have a one-to-one relationship with objects in the novel. Others may embody one or more of the themes Ozeki treats in the novel. Still others are the artists’ response to an aspect of the text that corresponded to something in their own lives.

1. Begin your hunt by choosing an object (or objects) from the Tidal Shelf. Study the object closely and write a brief description noting its size, form, color, texture, material(s) and identifying what it is. Imagine that you are writing this for someone who has not seen the object but needs a complete and detailed description to identify it.
2. Find at least one reference to the object in the text and note the page number. Based on your understanding of the novel, situate your chosen object in the narrative of the novel. What is its significance to the characters? How does it relate to the overarching themes of the novel?
3. Now think about the object that you have chosen in relation to the exhibition as a whole. What connections might it have to objects in the stone stacks, the palindromes suspended in the stairwell and the cabinets and vitrines? Refer to the accompanying wall texts to get you started.

Keep in mind that your scavenger hunt is not so much a matter of trying to discover the artists’ intentions but rather, a collaboration with the artists to expand the “meanings” of Ruth Ozeki’s book as it is experienced this fall at LMU. The meanings of a work of art and/or literature are in constant flux. The Mona Lisa, for example, does not mean the same in the 21st century as it did when Da Vinci was commissioned to paint it in 1503. Today thousands of people a day crowd around it in the Louvre, multiple books are written about the portrait of Francesco del Gioconda’s wife, songs are sung about the mystery of her smile and reproductions of the painting can be found in every country on the planet. Think of yourselves as working with the artists to make meaning(s) for the exhibition, the book and yourselves.
STONE STACKS  (3rd floor; right set of shelves in photo)
Books, stones.

Browsing the stacks is becoming a lost art and pleasure in libraries as search and research methods evolve with the development of digital media. Perusing these stacked books, words, and stones in a leisurely manner recuperates the library's role as a space for slow time. Philosophical excerpts mark different ways of thinking about how stones and humans relate to one another, an important theme within the current 'geological turn' in critical theory and the humanities generally. Stone displays and poetic texts invite meditative immersion in the deep time of geology, opening a dialogue between stone and story, earth and humans.

**Slow time exercises for this display:**

1. View/read the exhibit closely and slowly for 10 minutes. Write down any thoughts, reactions, questions, or concepts that are sparked by the displays, including the texts.
2. Pick a stone, stone stack, or object on display and write a precise description (size, form, texture, color).
3. Write a short text that responds to your selected item. It can be a poem, a series of thoughts, a reflection.
4. Note your responses to the balanced stones—what thoughts, feelings, or ideas do you have in looking at them? How do stone stacks relate to time? What kinds of time are involved in the stone stacks?
5. How does the Stone Stacks exhibit make you think about time? About the relation of humans and stone? Humans and earth? Write 100 – 250 words about any of these questions.
SEDIMENTAL STORIES

These shelves display student-composed spine poems inspired by the idea of slow time. Spine poems are 'sedimental stories'; stacked books resemble geological strata, and accrue layered meanings through the process of embedding one level upon another. Books are also the floors or 'stories' in the edifice constituted by the spine poem. Just as spines are a book's backbone, stones are the 'bones of the earth,' a trope found across many cultures' writings about rocks.
DOPPELGÄNGER (3rd floor)
Richard Turner
2016
Stone, bronze, wood, concrete

Chinese scholar’s rocks are often referred to as spirit stones. As such, they are thought to be vessels for *qi*, the energy that animates the entire universe. The bronze casting standing behind the Chinese scholar’s rock is its spirit double, its doppelgänger. The form and texture of the rock were duplicated by means of the lost wax process, an ancient technology dating to 4000 BC. The complexity and wondrous nature of the transformation from stone into bronze are appropriate to the creation of a doppelgänger – the sinister being that challenges the very core of one’s identity. The elemental materials employed in the process – wax, clay, plaster and bronze – hearken back to the primitive mysteries of alchemy and the erasure of distinctions between the animate and inanimate.

On one hand, the ghostly bronze casting can be understood as a literal embodiment of the stone’s *qi*. On the other hand, the bronze is a reproduction of a unique object, and as such it raises questions about the value of replication. A pale shadow of the lustrous black stone, does the ghostly doppelgänger make the scholar’s rock appear all the more vital, or does the mere presence of a facsimile diminish our experience of the original?
When the Bodhidharma first arrived in China he is said to have spent nine years meditating in silence in a cave near the Shaolin monastery. This legendary episode of “wall gazing” is the subject of many paintings, including one by the 15th century Japanese painter Sesshu Toyo. In Sesshu’s version the Bodhidharma faces the cave wall, brow deeply furrowed, bulging and eyes wide open. The wall of the cave, as Sesshu renders it, conforms roughly to the contours of the Bodhidharma’s figure. This is conventionally interpreted as the artist’s way of expressing the harmony between the natural world and the Bodhidharma’s effort to achieve enlightenment.

Inspired by Sesshu’s painting, this arrangement pairs a Vietnamese wood carving of the Bodhidharma with a Chinese stone. The stone and the woodcarving sit on corner pieces (cut stone used to finish the outside corners of masonry surface). The drama of the Bodhidharma’s quest for satori is set on a base intended to suggest a stage for a Japanese Noh play. The Bodhidharma gazes fiercely upward towards the stone. The stone seems to recoil from the intensity of his determined look. But this is not an adversarial relationship. The colors and textures of the stone and the wood complement one another. The Bodhidharma and the stone become one.
REFLECTING ON THE EXHIBITION AS A WHOLE

Go back through the exhibits and analyze the materials in terms of nature vs. culture: how does that line get drawn or crossed in the exhibit?

Consider the three philosophers' quotations in Stone Stacks in relation to this question.

Examine all the exhibits and observe what materials are natural, and what materials are human-made. What aspects of the exhibit are natural, and what are human constructions? How are the exhibits playing with this distinction?

Write notes on each exhibit.

In his essay, "Viewing Stones: A Contemporary Perspective," Richard Turner writes:

Viewing stones are conventionally considered to be a portal to the natural world and the reverence and awe we associate with a romantic view of nature. Contemplation of a stone actively engages the imagination, transporting us to an idealized world where we are, momentarily, at one with nature…. We are, more than ever, in need of a respite from the velocity and anxiety of contemporary life. Our relation to the natural however, is an ambiguous one. We praise stewardship of the land and, at the same time, promote exploration, even exploitation of its resources. As potent emblems of the natural world, viewing stones might also be employed to provoke questions about the 'inconvenient truth' of our relationship with the planet.

Reflect and write about the human relationship with the planet expressed through materials from the exhibition.