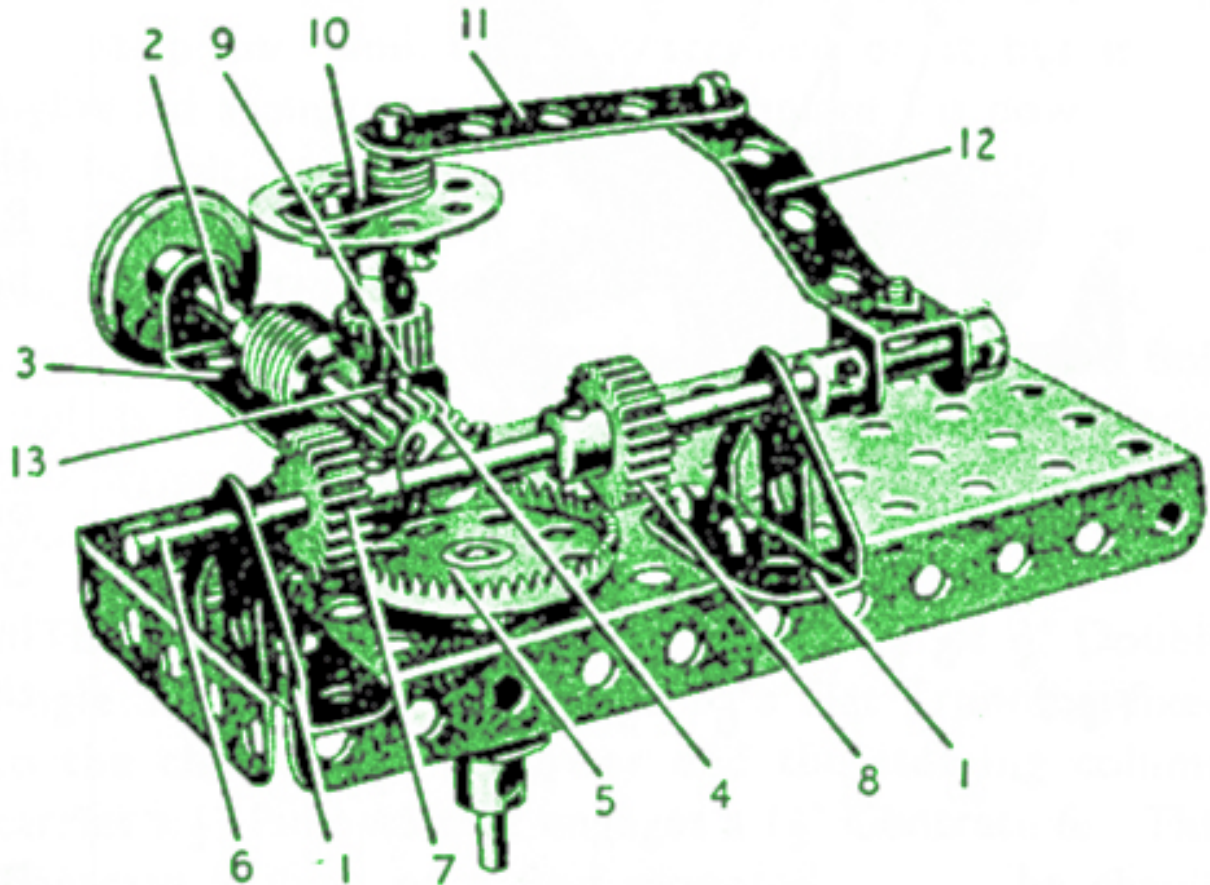


THE REVERSING MACHINE: a theatre of Kairos and Chronos.

"the steps a man takes, from the day of his birth to the day of his death, trace an inconceivable figure in Time¹. The divine intelligence perceives that figure at once, as man's intelligence perceives a triangle. That figure, perhaps, has its determined function in the economy of the universe..." (Jorge Luis Borges)



A Question:

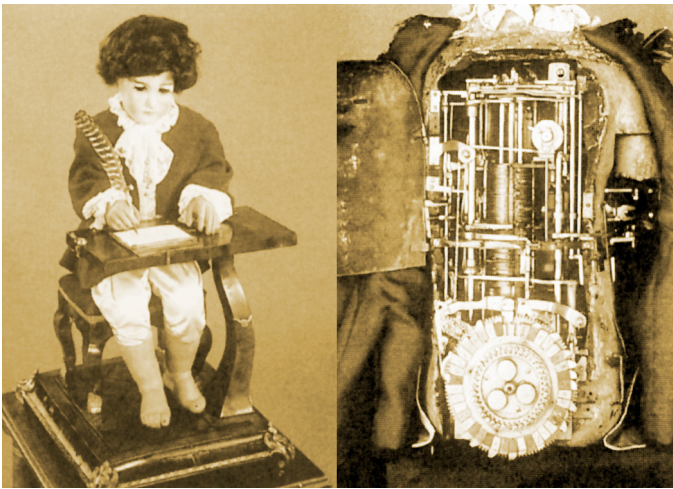
Is it a nostalgic or retrograde act to manipulate the essence of Time with a *mechanical* device? No – because mechanics gives us the metaphorical toolkit to “*deal with*” time in the same way that the physical gives us the metaphorical toolkit to “*deal with*” Metaphysics. While we always assume the Mind is “just like” the most advanced piece of technology we can imagine (a camera? a telephone exchange? And now a computer?) The universe still seems like a complex *machine*.

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Mirror of Enigma in Labyrinths*, Penguin Classics 2000.

In the Arts Laboratory Berlin we will install a *time machine* ; with which we will attempt to manipulate the fabric of time in the space of the gallery.

The central device (literally and figuratively comprising the functioning core) is a kinetic sculpture in the form of a self-reversing gearbox mechanism which will trigger and power various (forward and reverse) looping devices. As the drive shaft is powered the output turns at a steady rate for a certain amount of time then stops and quickly starts to turn in the opposite direction for the same amount of time; a mechanical palindrome. This behaviour is entirely determined by the mechanism, (not by any kind of digital controller) being consequently completely transparent - revealing both the *what* and the *how* of its action. This will be our Time-Setter, the ***Reversing Machine***.

An Aside



Jaquet-Droz's *Writer* can never see what we see - that he is operated by complicated machinery - because his creator has placed the opening on the poor boy's back. This may or may not be tragic for him; it is for us because it leads us to question what machinery makes *ourselves* work.

Driven in turn by this device will be an ongoing repertoire of looped "behaviours" - sounds, images, kinetics, *streams of instants* - flowing first in one direction then another and at each reversal assuming subtly different relationships to one another. These we will gradually build up over the first part of the exhibition, sampling the city and the first invited visitors to the space.

But surely the idea of a “Reversing Machine” is fundamentally paradoxical? A linear motor imparts motion in one of two directions - but which constitutes “forwards” and which “reverse” might be difficult to determine. The motor starts and runs “forwards” for a while; it stops and goes in the opposite direction. After a similar interval has passed it stops and starts again in the opposite direction - is it reversing? Or is it restoring its “forward” motion?

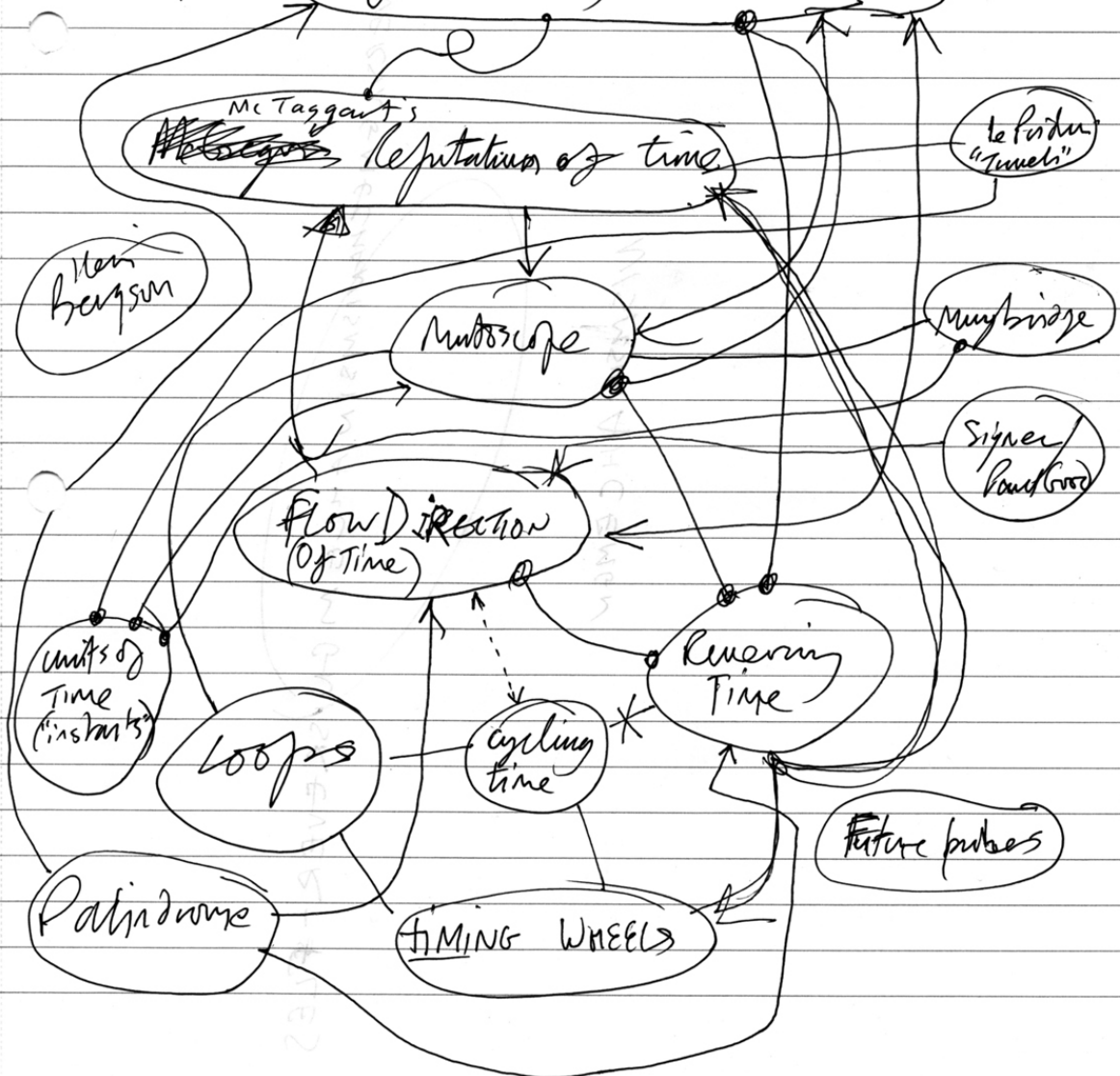
There will be a longer period of reflections in which the work will constantly change and re-combine, at intervals generating unique and significant alignments and conjunctions. Finally there will be a period of slow subtraction and dis-assembly until finally only the Mechanism and the Memory remain.

If one could wind back one’s life to a former point, the fear is that the life one lived (in) a second time would be all too similar to the first - but perhaps those differences would be enough?

In his novel “Slaughterhouse 5” Kurt Vonnegut uses as a device a fictional alien race from the planet Tralfamadore; *“... the Universe does not look like a lot of bright dots to the creatures from Tralfamadore. The creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going, so that the heavens are filled with rarefied, luminous spaghetti. And Tralfamadorians don’t see human beings as two-legged creatures, either. They see them as great millipedes – with babies’ legs at one end and old peoples’ legs at the other...”*ⁱ This is precisely the *inconceivable figure in Time* Borges is describing. The loops we will gradually attach to the *Reversing Machine* bend an action back on itself, join it at either end, and spin it round and round for as long as we can bear to watch it first in one direction - then in another, to make an embedded set of 4-dimensional palindromes.

ⁱ Vonnegut, Kurt, 1970, *Slaughterhouse 5* , Cape, London

Time. - Self-reversing mechanism



Turntable(s)
+ tone arm(s)

