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TIME BEING: BEING TIME

Time is the most unknown of all unknown things.
Aristotle, 384 BC – 322 BC

What do we know about time? How do our perceptions of time shape our thoughts and experiences? How can visual art help in unpicking these questions? This exhibition brings together several artists who, working across a variety of media, all bring some new understanding to the nature of time and our perception of it. In his Lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness (1928), Husserl distinguishes between objective time in the world, the inner time of experience, and a deeper consciousness of inner time. This is a good introduction to what is the most complicated and ungraspable of subjects. Theories of time from all of these perspectives abound, here we focus on some core ideas about the nature of inner and outer time on a journey through physics, philosophy, zen and neuroscience concluding with a discussion of how visual art can open these ideas in ways that transcend other forms of research.

In 1865, Rudolf Clausius had stated “The entropy of the universe tends to a maximum”. This important discovery came to be known as the second law of thermodynamics, it describes entropy: the thermodynamic property directing towards dissipation. Heat will warm cool air, and vice versa...until reaching a point of equilibrium. Everything tends from low to high entropy, which suggests time has a direction. There is a more ordered past, and a less ordered future. Ultimately this leads to a point of dissipation where there is no more movement and therefore no more time, named the ‘heat death of the universe’ where eventually there is an eternity of nothing... The second law of thermodynamics fits with our unquestionable sense of time flowing from past to present to future, however, the idea of time’s flow is not decisive- it relates to matter existing within time, it does not necessarily describe time itself. Although the ‘arrow of time’ may legitimately imply temporal directions of past and future, this does not then mean the arrow itself is moving towards the future... just as a compass pointing north does not in itself move north.

As Einstein said, “The past, present and future are only illusions, even if stubborn ones”. Einstein fundamentally changed our understanding of external, or

‘objective time’. As opposed to Newton’s absolute time, and absolute space; independent from each other and our ways of measuring either, Einstein’s theory of relativity showed us that time and space are not separate but inter-related spacetime, within which time is not an absolute but relative, allowing for many theories of time including time travel.

It is possible that past, present and future exist simultaneously in the same way that points exist in space, or places on a map. To take this further, there is discussion in contemporary physics that perhaps time does not exist at all, but is merely a perceptual construct of our own self consciousness. In his article *Is Time an Illusion* in Scientific American in 2010, Craig Callander writes;

The universe may be timeless, but if you imagine breaking it into pieces, some of the pieces can serve as clocks for the others. Time emerges from timelessness. We perceive time because we are, by our very nature, one of those pieces.

Around the same time as Einstein’s was changing our understanding of time in the physical universe through its interrelated nature, western philosophy was also undergoing important shifts in understanding through the work of the phenomenologists. For two hundred years, western thinking had been bound by Cartesian Dualism, first suggest by Descartes in the 17th century. Descartes changed philosophy with his suggestion that the mind and body are two separate entities; the mind being non material and the body material, influencing each other yet remaining independent, dividing our sensory and intellectual understandings of the world. This mind/body problem dominated philosophy until the birth of phenomenology at the turn of the twentieth century, when Husserl began deconstructing dualism by relocating our experience in the world. His approach attempted to look at traditional philosophical problems unbound from historical tradition, which he did by analyzing phenomena simply as they are, seeking to avoid conditioned thought to get to the truth of the experience. In his Lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness Husserl applies this attention to temporal phenomena (such as music which succeeds through time) he describes how our perceptions move from being received to retained (as musical notes remain in memory after being heard before drifting out of consciousness) essentially describing our sensory perception of the flow of time as a continuum.

Husserl’s phenomenology paved the way for the work of Martin Heidegger. A student of Husserl’s, Heidegger’s philosophy of temporality arguably moves on from Husserl’s philosophy of internal time consciousness. In his seminal book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces the notion of ‘Da sein’ or ‘beingness’ which locates being within temporality; bound by time. He also explores the idea of this original being in time as transcendent of the individual, as inter related;

Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The they, which supplies the answer to the who of everyday Da-sein, is the nobody to whom every Da-sein has always already surrendered itself, in its being-among-one-another. (Being in Time, 1927)

There are many references and relations in Heidegger’s philosophy to East Asian thought, particularly Zen. In terms of understanding our experiential relationship to time it could be said that Heidegger was the closest of all western thinkers to really deepen our understanding of the nature of time consciousness, however it could also be said that ultimately he was held back by western philosophy’s dualistic heritage. Zen on the other hand, free of the rational, intellectual constraints of western thought, has long embraced embodied, direct experience.

In the 13th century philosopher Dōgen Zenji wrote the poem *Time Being*, in which he expresses time itself as being, and all being as time;

For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.
For the time being proceed along the bottom of the deepest ocean.
For the time being three heads and eight arms.
For the time being an eight- or sixteen-foot body.
For the time being a staff or whisk.
For the time being a pillar or lantern.
For the time being the sons of Zhang and Li.
For the time being the earth and sky.

Contry to the western search to articulate time as some deeper universal structure, or as a perceptual mechanism within ourselves, Dōgen embraces the impermanent, indeterminate nature of time, as well as the absence of it. We could relate this understanding of time to theories within astrophysics of time being an illusion. Time is impossible to pin down, it is unknowable, and by embracing this, we come closer to understanding it. It is this existential experience that is at the core of all Zen teaching; true understanding lies beyond philosophy, we actually have to be it, the real nature of things lies beyond any rational understanding. Whereas Descartes gave us the duality of mind and body, Zen exists in nonduality, where there is no separation between the sense of the self and that which is external, instead there is only intersubjectivity, or interconnectedness. In Zen practice, the nondual experience of being and time as interconnected is arrived at through meditation, through the simple act of attention, becoming ‘the observer’ of both inner and outer experience in the present moment.

In his forward to the volume on Zen Buddhism by D.T Suzuki, William Barrett recalls a visit to Heidegger, when he was found reading one of Suzuki’s books. Heidegger remarked, “If I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings”. Heidegger was also concerned with a key notion in Zen- the idea of nothing as expressed in *Being and Time*, “The nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings.” Returning to thermodynamics and relativity; the relationship between matter and time, between nothing and no time, we can see the connections between physics, Heidegger and Dōgen’s thinking; “Most people think time is passing and do not realize that there is an aspect that is not passing. To comprehend this is to realize being”.

In this case, we could say that mind is the cosmos made conscious, that our self awareness and reflection is the way the universe understands itself.

Having looked at the path of our understanding of time, both external and internal, through western science and philosophy, we can see parallels in how thought has attempted to bridge the divide of dualism. The suggestion is that the nature of being and time is more interconnected than previously understood, something Zen had expressed a millennia before. This argument has been significantly accelerated in the

wake of contemporary neuroscience, allowing us to readdress philosophical questions about consciousness through an entirely new framework. In relation to time, recent neuroscientific research suggests that our ability to imagine comes from the same neural networks as memory retention. It seems we have to remember the past to be able to imagine the future, just as Husserl’s temporality describes how our expectations for the coming moment and the memory of the one just passed are all simultaneously present. If memory is what allows us to imagine, then fiction and perceived reality are therefore far more interconnected than previously thought, and the past not as static as we believe it to be.

On an everyday level, we understand that the quality of our attention to our present affects the way in which we experience time’s flow: ‘time flies when we are having fun’. This plasticity of perception can also be intentional; the advanced practitioner of Zen meditation is capable of intentionally producing different experiential states, including nonduality. This provides a rich recourse for neuroscientific research. The potential of mapping the neural correlates of nondual experience not only tells us much about the brain, but it locates the ungraspable experience of indeterminate, interconnected time, or even no time, into something we can actually see.

So how do these ideas of interconnectivity relate to the making, viewing and thinking about art? In 1996 scientists researching connections between neural activity and hand to mouth actions in macaque monkeys, accidentally came across what is now called the ‘mirror neuron’. What they discovered was that the monkeys had some of the same neural responses when observing the scientists pick up food, as when they picked up the food themselves. Further research suggests that humans have mirror neurons functioning in the same way, and this can tell us much about how we learn, relate and empathise with each other. To return to Heidegger, “Everyone is the other, and no one is himself” these neuroscientific discoveries take us yet further towards a plurality of interconnections between the self, the other and the external. What the mirror neuron points to is that when I see your action, I unconsciously have an embodied experience which mirrors it.

This deep empathetic mechanism also opens up intersubjective readings of art works. As we track

the path of an objects making we can relate it to our own physicality. Art functions as a dialectic, within which an image, object or action opens up abstractions and ideas able to transcend language. These we are invited to articulate in a sphere of thought and experience, the map of which is not drawn merely by reason and intellect. The photograph of the hand holding sand becomes our hand, we feel the weight of the steps across the beach, we trace the cuts, the brush strokes, the rolls, the light brings us directly into ourselves through our heightened attention and perception of the external. This recognition is not limited however to our physicality, more the embodiment is an unconscious empathetic vehicle which both integrates and co exists with our ability to frame art works through various critical models. On the most basic level, the work of art is a connection point, through which we can recognize each other, and in turn ourselves. Although there is an implied paradox between neurological reductionism and the expansive state of interconnectivity, the suggestion is that while our consciousness is defined by our critical ability to self reflect, to observe ourselves, we are also far more intuitively connected than we may be aware of.

Coming back to the exhibition, the works touch on time in many different guises; temporality, attention, external and internal perception, marking time, our comprehension of cosmic time are all explored in the works. Art gives us experiences of the connections between us, as we hope is shown in *Time Being*. Ideally the works act as a platform from which, while exploring time, we can discuss not only the interconnected nature of contemporary research, but the intersubjective ways in which we read art. To summarise, although we may understand very little about the real nature of time, approaching it reveals much about the nature of us. If the closest we can get to time is through embodied acceptance of unknowing, through intention and attention to the present, what is in fact revealed is that where time may be an illusion, so are the divisions that we have constructed between ourselves. Art gives us a language with which we can share the first person embodied experience and therefore contribute some deeper understanding to being and time.

Text by Rebecca Partridge and Randi Nygård



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TIME BEING



1

EUAN WILLIAMS
IF YOU STOP WE START,
LIGHT INSTALLATION
VARIABLE DIMENSIONS
2012

1

If you stop we start. So let's all get into an elevator and stop. Let's feel the lurch of the acceleration in our stomachs as the elevator sets off. Now this particular elevator is brand new with all the best springs and suspension. It's so smooth and it moves so slowly we don't know if we are rising or falling. We have to stop, think, feel and concentrate – use all of our senses to find out if our stomachs are lurching up or down. After a short while there is no lurching; no acceleration – we're a part of the elevator. We're moving with its movements. We've become accustomed to the rise or fall. We're like bodies on the surface of a planet that have become unable feel the planet spin.

Some lights in this room are slowly dimming up and down. If you can't see it - remember it. Perhaps this booklet used to be harder to read – perhaps it was easier to read. Perhaps you can

feel yourself waking up – as if you're stretching the muscles in your legs. Let's stop, think, feel and concentrate – a moment of Zen. I would like us to stop and try to be aware of all the things that are seemingly ephemeral and non-explicit.

MARTIN JOHN CALLANAN
ALL THE PEOPLE WHO
HAVE EVER LIVED, AND WILL
EVER LIVE, 2012

SUNSET, 6 RAJAB 1431, +31° 9'
15.67", -3° 58' 13.90"
ARCHIVAL DIGITAL PRINT
38,6x29,7 cm

2

There are five main classifications of sand on earth, ranging from 0.0625 mm up to 2 mm in diameter. If we use the median grain range (0.25 - 0.55 mm) with a single grain representing one star, then all the stars in the observable universe would be represented by every grain of sand on earth: on all the beaches of every coast and in all the deserts - and elsewhere - in every nation of all continents. If one of these same grains of sand represented a single per-

son: all the people who have lived - and ever will live - would be represented by a single handful of sand.

SALLY UNDERWOOD
WALKING ON MORONDAVA
BEACH, 2008, VIDEO, LOOP
WITH THANKS TO BLUE
VENTURES

3

The suitcases came from the market. There's not much stuff to buy in Madagascar. Not much at all other than functionless junk from china. So these suitcases are made out of tin. One is painted red and one is painted green. The next day they went to Heathrow Airport, alone, at a cost of 30,000 Ariary to me (£30) and £250 to my mother who released them from customs.

While the people around me made something and anything out of nothing and foraged on burning rubbish heaps, I was trying to find a solution to a different problem: such an excess of baggage that moving around the island without roads had become was a complex and unloveable task. So I bought these cases and sent all that I

could do without back to where I had come from.

My mind had the desire to be always on the move, to visit every place I liked the sound of - without weight - as if i was one if those people who really is not invested in stuff. But i wanted my books, cameras, computer around around me as ballast against a place that is wholly other. Like walking through a swamp while looking at the stars. Or walking in the dessert with backache because the bag is too heavy: head on the horizon; mind in the ass.

OLIVIA MOORE
ROSENTHALER PLATZ
RECORDED, 2012
POSTERS, PASTE, AND RESIN
VARIABLE DIMENSIONS

4

Over the span of three months, I collected posters from around the area of Rosenthalerstrasse in Berlin, where my studio is located. These items were accumulated on a daily basis and incorporated into an increasing form. The resulting sculpture is not a linear record of time but rather an archive of visual information that

is obscured of its written legibility. It references both its original material sources of the posted advertisements on the street, and the trees from which those were made, referencing an intersection of landscape and architecture, nature and urban space.

REBECCA PARTRIDGE
IN THE DAYTIME, 2011
ARCHIVAL DIGITAL PRINT,
80X100 cm

5

These paintings shift between geometric abstraction and photorealistic landscapes, each piece essentially exploring deep perceptual structures, both internal and perceived in nature. On one hand the geometric works as a visual anchor, reflecting our internality, this is then mirrored in the structure of the landscapes raising questions about how much of what we find 'beautiful' is in fact a reflection of ourselves. The paintings emerge through a meditative process of sustained attention, the fleeting moment of the photograph becomes stretched in time. It becomes durational. This contemplative space created by

the physical making of the work transforms both the image and our viewing of it.

RANDI NYGÅRD
DER AUGENBLICK
GESICHT, GEDICHTE,
GESCHICHTE
SICHT, DICHTER, SCHICHTE, 2012
MIRRORS, DIGITAL PRINTS,
WOOD, 172x30x30 cm

6

Some people can learn a new language in two weeks. They say they do it by an intuitive understanding of what a word means, depending on the sound, length and rhythm. To them words starting or ending with the same sound will stand for similar forms. Husserl said the present is a thickening (eine Verdickung), a field of time where the past passes and the future is anticipated. Verdickung relates to Dichtung and Gedichte in German, both meaning poetry. Gesicht means face, and Geschichte history, and from there we get Sicht, Dichte, Schichte, view, density and layer, which all, to me, relate to the perception of the present moment.

Olivia Moore
Rebecca Partridge
Randi Nygard
Sally Underwood
Euan Williams
Martin John Callanan

The Neuro Bureau
Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei,
Spinnereistraße 7, Leipzig
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