THIS MIGHT JUST PASS THE TIME

8 NOVEMBER – 2 DECEMBER 2023

AMALIA LINDO, CHRISTINA MAY CAREY, AARON CHRISTOPHER REES, MARCUS IAN MCKENZIE

CURATOR: ANNABEL BROWN

*This might just pass the time*

*Just drifting, in this simple world, like a country dream, asleep to discussion, the numbness of content.*

* *Genesis P-Orridge*

In “Just Drifting,” Genesis P.Orridge from the psychedelic rock band Psychic TV sings about a drift with a dreamy languor. Here, in Genesis’s drift, one is pulled into an idyllic image of “a country stream, precious and pure.” Calm, husky and lush, there is a hypnotic quality to Genesis’s melody that lets you shut your eyes and sink into its ethereal world. Yet, there’s a darkness to it that is obscured - of losing yourself completely in this drift - dazed and captured by a chimaera.  Does the same risk apply as we drift into the techno-social? In it, there are similar qualities - we see ourselves unmoored and adrift, absorbed and disillusioned. Yet Genesis’s drift is much more akin to some kind of halcyon day that the singer recalls knowingly, intimately – “you surround me, and cover me, protect me and caress me.”  Today’s drift offers no solace. Instead, it feels as if we are hopelessly estranged, leading to neither knowing or affection, but only to hauntings and the loss of what was once familiar.

The resulting experience of disorientation is nothing new, of course, but perhaps the constantly renewed rupture of the present is such that *we can no longer grasp onto anything that seems to be occurring*. In *Empty Moments: Cinema Modernity and Drift*, the film theorist Leo Charney renders this experience through the notion of the “drift.” Here, the drift is an experiential philosophy that describes the experience of “being unable to locate a stable sense of the present moment.” Through an exploration of film and broader culture in the late 19th century, Charney identifies drift as the defining quality of modernity.  For Charney, drift follows modernity’s dialectal turn, marking a shift from the classical paradigm and its stable linear order to usher in an era characterised by fragmentation, shock and dispersal, where the certainty of perception was constantly in question. In becoming drift, the present no longer constituted “an even, forward flow but a mercurial and variable experience, diffuse and distracted, unquantifiable.”

But any glimmer of becoming weightless and free in this disjunctive state of excessive and unmoored distraction will have already disappeared from drifting into the thickening fog of the here and now. In our crisis-stricken, neoliberal age characterised by economic stagnation, populist anxieties and media spectacles, we are no longer just hopefully afloat. Moreover, with the implosion of the social into handheld devices and the 24/7 visibility of interactive media, we are barraged with continuous streams of information vying for our attention. Under the spell of the virtual and its superabundance of information, never has so much been depicted and watched. Yet the incessant social noise and data floods filling our algorithm governed, ad-saturated timelines appear to be moving away from the presumed side effects of shock, excitement and overwhelm. Instead, the sheer volume of content now weighs down on us, immobilising us in these cybernetic loops that lead nowhere, in which time, rather than passing, refreshes, and events, series, and seasons pass by with a sense of dissociative momentum.

As we increasingly experience simulacrums as our prime reality, our experience of actual reality has been supplanted by the artificial whims of what we swipe at, scroll past and click through to. Consequently, the temporality of the infosphere has become too fast, slippery and vast for the technologies that once helped situate consumers within the rhythms of a collective day. There is no measured rhythm to the present. As Henri Bergson wrote in *Concerning the Nature of Time*, “every duration is thick; real time has no instants.” However, in the temporality of the techno-social, we inhabit an unrelenting present, where time is reduced to second-long snippets, confined to an atomised, abstracted instant that presses us for a reaction and disappears into an ever-increasing blur of events. Rather than the thickness of duration, the present is a thin slice, with each moment becoming more volatile, as we blindly trip over in our relentless, stumbling, forward movement. Today’s drift marks a transition into a hyper-saturated dimension of experience, where the solidity and legibility of anything falters at blinding speed, deflecting the easy knowability of what appears most immediate.

As information abrades information in this circling indirection of the drift, trying to detect, let alone salvage anything,  reminds me of a passage from John Berger’s book  *Steps Toward a Small Theory of the Visible*. In this excerpt, Berger recalls the experience of being unable to accord meaning to the situation he finds himself in. The collapse of any distinction to this moment renders his surroundings  unstable and absurd:

“The connection between words and what they signified had been broken. It seemed  to me that I was lost; the first human power - the power to name - was failing or had  always been an illusion. All was dissolution.”

Being in today’s drift similarly results in an experience resembling Berger’s disorientation. Searching for a pattern, meaning or connection to the detritus of human data becomes both tragic and futile. Strangely, this doesn’t engender such dizzying angst but rather an ambivalent, and perhaps troubling, sense of calm, as this floating imprecision and anticipation that dissolves into nothing becomes the only way to know my own or any other experience.

“Let anyone try, I will not say to arrest, but to notice or attend to, the *present* moment of time.  One of the most baffling experiences occurs. Where is it, this present? It has melted in our  grasp, fled where we could touch it, gone in the instant of becoming.”

- William James

Annabel Brown, 2023

Level 7, Room 14, Nicholas Building, 37 Swanston St, Melbourne VIC 3000

GALLERY OPEN Wednesday to Saturday, 12pm – 6pm

T (+61 3) 9650 0093 | E info@blindside.org.au | blindside.org.au

 BLINDSIDE is a not-for-profit artist run space.

**The Allen Foundation**