

THE TIME FUNNEL, 2019

multi channel video installation with sound

My little presentation will take you on a journey to Cuba.

The projection you see here is one part of a multichannel video installation from 2019 on the subject of "time".

The installation consists of a cycle of individual portraits. Each video loop is filmed from a static camera perspective in one take. This corresponds to the motionlessness of the portrayed singularities, who spend their time doing nothing at all in the streets of Havana.

A totally common situation or sight for Cubans. For me it is a radically subversive act of self-determination.

In Cuba, people watch the day go by.

What you see today is still rooted in yesterday's world. The past always overlaps into the now, it is modified, rebuilt, modernized bit by bit. The Cuban daily routine is characterized by repetition and routines. Between Cadillacs from the 1950s and limousines that were welded together from Russian Ladas, a few brandnew Chinese buses sway by, while the sea rolls out the same wave in front of you again and again. You hear the steady noise of time. The linearity of past and future is slowly decomposing. The present spreads languidly and takes over the space like fermenting yeast dough.

People on Havana's streets move very slowly. They are in no hurry. They cross multi-lane roads like relaxed snails. They observe the bustle without any guilty conscience. "To be late" is relative. Cubans decide themselves, autonomously, about their resource of "time".

They sit around waiting for something to happen, or perhaps more aptly: waiting for nothing to happen. If nothing happens, your thoughts can not focus on a "not-yet", whereas everyday routine stops the nostalgic "no more". The bloated present wants to be filled. When the events fade and the mind is without intention, wants nothing, misses nothing, desires nothing - doing nothing seems to be an adequate stuffing.

But where and how can you comprehend time? Is it hidden behind the events? Do events obscure the view of time? What is left of time, if it is not structured and made visible by the duration of incidents? Is time „empty“ when it is not filled with action? For western visitors, Cuba seems to have fallen out of time.

It manifests architecturally in the ramshackled colonial buildings, which can be renovated only little by little. It manifests in the mode of transport. And of course in the socialist system. Shopping can eat up the whole day, an appointment at a governmental office can extend over several weeks. Why should you plan, if you

don't know if any of the products you need are in stock? Maybe they will be tomorrow. Maybe next week. Maybe only next month. Online appointments do not exist. When it rains, employees do not come to work.

Cuban people appear to us like distant images of ourselves from another time. A time, when time and work were not yet inseparably linked. Incredulous, one wonders how they can waste the time so lavishly, without using it in any way. This form of idle inactiveness, that is so frowned upon in western cultures, is transformed by the Cubans into an art that allows the time to pass. But doing nothing is not so easy. You have to endure a state of being without any distractions.

In a neoliberal system, lifetime that is not used in a productive way is labeled as „wasted“ time. This perception of "lost" time seems to be a cultural one. The quote "time is money" from Benjamin Franklin's "Advice for Young Merchants" from 1748 succinctly sums up the Western capitalist approach to an individual and systemic sense of time: the construction of time as commodity.

In western societies, people deal with time and subject it to social profit maximization and individual self-optimization. But if time is a commodity, what currency is it? And is it a good deal to make as much cash as possible under maximum stress and use of time? Do we submit ourselves voluntarily to the pressure that is exerted by a time-disciplined society?

To sell your own time as expensive as possible, you are under constant time pressure. Adapt to the timing. Run after time. The value of the present moment disappears. It is sacrificed to the analysis of the past and a predictable cast of the future. Time for leisure, which is not used to adapt to social expectations and conventions according to the capitalist logic of exploitation, is considered pointless. In order to feel ok towards society, one has to hide inactivity behind terms like "deceleration" and "mindfulness".

Due to the economical crisis in Cuba, there is an abounding resource of time. It is not important to hurry if the result of saving time is uncertain. When there is a shortage of consumer goods, money loses its importance and value. Individual time is freed from the timing of money.

In a system of slowness, determination by others over your personal resource of "time" is no longer ubiquitous. Even during the time provided for work, there is time that remains for yourself. For drifting thoughts. For daydreams. For social interaction that does not serve productivity. And for solidarity.

In Cuba, the present is digging a hole. It was just there, in your nose, suddenly it slips in front of your field of vision. A small "mouche volante" first, a lint that can not be removed by winking, persists stubbornly in your view.

The thin crack does not disappear, but, on the contrary, continues to inflate. Fascinated, you look into it. You can not help it, a gentle suction goes out from this spot. You see the environment but you don't, it blurs before your eyes. The dark point deepens, drills a funnel. Your thoughts slide sluggishly down its inner surfaces, and you're in, in a state where time no longer exists or in an endless moment.

Time is a radically finite resource in terms of the life of each individual. Regardless of whether one lives in a neoliberal-capitalist or a socialist society, the control of personal time is an important instrument of domination. In Cuba, compulsion and control over individual time is undermined by an extreme slowness. Self-determination about time is a radically subversive attitude. The Cubans take their time back.

Christine de la Garenne, 2019