Emily DiCarlo
The Propagation of Uncertainty

Emily DiCarlo's exhibition, entitled *The Propagation of Uncertainty*, explores what she terms "the infrastructure of time and the intimacy of duration." With respect to the former, DiCarlo's project investigates a network of governmental facilities (and analytic processes) that uphold Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). Relying on a series of 82 atomic clocks, the nodes frequently find themselves situated in national laboratories (a preponderance of them in Europe, North America, and leading industrial nations). At each, since the 1970s, microwaves or electrons serve as benchmarks for temporal frequency. However, at every data point there are unknown variables: variations in individual clocks, noise delays during data transmission, errors, etc. Regulating and coordinating UTC involves continual analyses of readings taken from each site, using complex algorithms, and is undertaken by the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) in Paris. A monthly memorandum—known as *Circular T*—publishes their conclusion, which is then distributed to the network, calibrating *the* time.

The exhibition comprises two works. *Circular T: A Collection of Uncertainties* is an online database and series of 82 red binders sitting on shelves mounted to the gallery wall. Each binder contains a written document (authored by the artist) loosely styled in the manner of the *Circular T*, apparently issued by an atomic clock facility.[1] The texts themselves are variously poetic, idiosyncratic,

and diaristic. Marshalling first-person narratives, they demonstrate the depth of DiCarlo's research through a series of reveries. Sometimes a document recounts the artist's visit to a particular facility. Elsewhere, the artist offers more esoteric reflections. The cumulative effect of this corpus is to highlight local textures and particularities of the "universal" temporal apparatus.

The second work is a three-channel video installation with the namesake title of the exhibition *The Propagation of Uncertainty*. Capturing an array of hardware within the time-keeping laboratory of the National Research Council in Ottawa, the footage bristles with cables, inputs, and blinking lights; inscrutable devices, trusty looking filing cabinets, and a round clock-face that ticks for a full minute. There is something uncanny about these electrical inputs, outputs, and wooden library drawers with handwritten tags. Indeed, despite all the technology, the ensemble looks supremely analogue. Having been established in 1970s, there are very few screens in the laboratory, only a few display panels. To contemporary viewers this collection of high technology looks retro, hardly a going concern. Throughout the work's duration, the voice of Canada's speaking clock reads out the time over and over again. There is something cloying about it—a windowless room, saturated with electricity and repetition. It is monotony raised to the highest technical fact, and if the viewer overcomes resistance to this monotony they are rewarded by a strange

Emily DiCarlo, *The Propagation of Uncertainty*, 2020. Three-channel video detail. Courtesy of the artist.

feeling of calm. Repose, of some kind—perhaps the sense of one's inner clock being calibrated. In today's accelerated cultural and digital economy, where even meditation breaks and moments to "stop and think" are offered up in 50-minute hours, slowing down is a difficult concept. Towards the end of DiCarlo's video the camera pans, and you see the artist lying on the floor—her eyes open in what might be bliss, or boredom's release into a new thought. Lying on the linoleum floor, at the foot of a bank of aluminum circuit boards, wearing a black worker's suit, in the midst of the room's crushing inhumanity, her face is illuminated by a glow. You know it issues from a fluorescent light, but somehow DiCarlo's expression—upward turned, mouth slightly open—suggests some form of beatitude, like she is being cradled by time, resting in its lap or belly. It is at this point (towards the end of the video) that you, the viewer, have finally slowed down enough to watch it again—at its own pace. Now, there is something deeply comforting about the speaking clock. Perhaps this is because it does not speed up, unlike the rest of your life.

Re-viewed, DiCarlo's prone figure performs a reverie of interiority: Jonah to an infrastructural and regulative whale; living potential, rather than action or perfect stillness. She seems to demonstrate a lack of yearning, or striving. What makes hers a reverie of repose is the intensity of this stillness. Looking at her, she appears to have overcome any disjunction between her intimate temporality and that of Ottawa's national timekeeping laboratory. Where does this leave the rest of us? Her silent figure refuses to say. And yet, the intimacy of her duration finds a voice in the red binders (whose sculptural presentation leans so much on the bureaucratic and the impersonal). If, in the video, DiCarlo's figure was struck mute by the count of the speaking clock (as if it were speaking for her), her voice returns on the page. Perhaps it can only live here. Why? Because speech as an *account* is qualitatively different from *counting* (the only thing a computer can truly do). The clock can never give an account of time, which is, strictly, the work of narration—and lived relations.

[1] BIPM uses the term "post-real time process" to describe the month-long work of reckoning the time data from the 82 sites. Essentially, the past always informs our future present tense. The report can be downloaded here: https://www.bipm.org/en/bipm-services/timescales/time-ftp/Circular-T.html