potentially usable as a metaphor by contemporary society – it must be an ambiguous one: hence his signing of those frightening late portraits with a Black Square in lieu of a signature, as though it could be adopted as code. The breadth allowed by ambiguity was freedom, but the dynamic of 'Adventures of the Black Square' is to barter it away. It is not by accident or due to the contingent erosions of a violent century that Malevich's various squares are not actually square but as irregular as their supports. *Black Quadrilateral* is a skewed rectangle. The printed, lined paper on which *Red Quadrilateral* is painted really does make it look modern – as in contemporary – while the shape itself is as non-graphic, even non-abstract, as a square could be. It looks like some fantastically oblique emblem of the irreducibility of physical objecthood: an individual's slightly asymmetrical face, the loom of a building or its shadow, a one-off sunset; anything confronting us with its otherness. It defies reproduction. When El Lissitzky, Steele or Max Bill draw a square it really is a square – an abstraction ripe for loading with others of the ideological kind.

The exhibition's emphasis on exposing abstraction to the parsings of relativism leaves it oblivious to the paradigm shifts going on behind the geometric facades of the works. This elision is most conspicuous when the utopian values of Modernism cedes to Minimalism, and early Conceptual Art which trades in geometrical idioms, such as the photographs of Àngels Ribé's 1970s performances, in which her black-costumed figure sundials an evening shadow, or Lis Rhodes's *Notes from Light Music*, 1976, with its squeaky, early-synth-like soundtrack produced by printing the streaming stripes of a film reel onto its audio-track, so that picture produces sound, and filmic structuralism produces a nascent Pop. This is quite a leap, and if its only continuities are the square cut of Andre's tiles, a relatively arbitrary one. At the back of the lower gallery, a trio of Andre's *10x10 Altstadt Lead Square*, 1967, Dan Flavin's *'Monument' for V. Tatlin*, 1966-69, and some of Rasheed Araeen's painted cubic lattices (*Chaaryaar*, 1968) intimate the unexplored (by this show) implications of the sliding of metaphysical modernism into a bewildering new era of postmodern irony, having undergone an apparently irreversible step from the possibility of a categorical, artistic assertion to its palpable absurdity. What is so unsettling about these three works is how they maintain – like Stella's proto-minimal 'Black Paintings' – one foot in both realms. Indeed, with hindsight that condition of paradox might be the essence of Minimalism, which is always asking us to attend to the essential material specificity of its objects at the same time as denouncing it as submissive to a geometric generalisation.

It seems symptomatic that on the other side of this watershed – in the selection of works from the 1980s to the 2000s – the geometric theme is outed as no more than a formalistic quirk traced through a miscellany of disparate idioms. Examples of 1990s quasi-functional 'design art' (Andrea Zittel, Liam Gillick) are made to look like too-functional accessories to a Peter Halley cell-and-conduit painting (*Auto Zone*, 1992), which typically transcends its apparently limited theory-bound purposes. The cantilevered awning of Gillick's early *Big Conference Platform*, 1998, looks more wistful than ever, torn between reclaiming its geometrical vocabulary for the hallowed secularism of cultural illumination (it needs some of those bare bulbs with which he used to stud the walls in order to complete the metaphor) and relinquishing it to the sculptural equivalent of the corporate logo – and more than ever inclined towards the former. When you consider how little his more recent work even activates this distinction, heading straight for a semblance of the corporate, this registers as a kind of pre-resistance to subsequent conformity.

The exceptions are works which resist integration by foregoing the pervasive attempt to say something – anything – about something, by awkwardly attaching ready-made narratives to geometric blanks. Isa Genzken's motley collection of Plexiglas offcuts, balanced on a very high plinth to form a frail model of skyscraper architecture, *New Buildings for Berlin (Beta)*, 2014, looks grandly triumphal, even utopian, despite all her efforts to humble it with the sarcasm of its absurd height. Armando Andrade Tudela's *Camion*, 2003, is a series of carouselled slides of lorries on the move, decorated with abstract designs. The backdrops are as unyielding of information as the painted decorations. The vernacular abstraction qualifies the landscapes – or their images – as inscrutable, by highlighting the geometries of land/sky/road. Abstraction's generalisations are here deployed critically and existentially. The piece might be a critique of the show's broad strokes – an example of how geometric abstraction can be more than solipsistic without its solipsism being betrayed. After all, not to *have* to communicate was one of the hard-earned freedoms of Modernism.

MARK PRINCE is an artist and writer based in Berlin.

How to Construct a Time Machine

MK Gallery Milton Keynes 23 January to 23 March

There are many ways of classifying time and its associated complexities, and Marquand Smith's curation of 25 artists takes on far more than movement between time zones. In the catalogue he categorises his choices as dealing with time as an ordering of the world ('chronos'), as a means of imposing order ('protocol'), as the driver of our unimaginable placement in the 4.5bn-year history of the world ('deep time') and as an account of the right or opportune moment ('kairos'). Mieke Bal dissects the more frequently made distinction between 'clock time' and 'Bergsonian time' in her insightful commissioned essay, albeit she illustrates her points only through artists not included – and I found myself wondering whether her choices of Christian Marclay, William Kentridge, Ann Veronica Janssens, Stan Douglas, Eija-Lisa Ahtila and Aernout Mik would outdo the actual line-up.

The phrase 'how to construct a time machine' comes from an 1899 essay by Alfred Jarry, which claims to explain how to realise what HG Wells imagined. That, too, is in the catalogue, and threatens to make sense as Jarry explains how 'were we able to remain immobile in the Flow of Time, then we should be able to travel through all past and future moments successively'. But when the mechanics of said machine are laid out, you recall that he was a pataphysicist, interested in 'the art of imaginary solutions'. This reads across rather well to the straight-faced absurdity of some of the art.

The show's aims, then, are complex and multi-stranded. Yet the most immediate question of time posed is a simple one: how long should we spend in the gallery? The installation is oppositional enough to suggest that Smith is not keen to detain us too long, but the reasons for this curatorial gambit remain obscure. Thus three substantial films (Majar Smrekar's chronological anthology of the look of sci-fi, *History of the Future*, 2012; the Otolith Group's self-contextualisation in history, *The Otolith Timeline*, 2003; and Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962) are pretty much thrown away on a trio of small monitors dominated by the adjoining soundtrack of Thomson & Craighead's *The Time Machine in Alphabetical Order*, 2010. We do see that to full effect – a big and loud reordering of the 1960 film of Wells's novel which I caught from all the consecutive '*all*'s' to a substantial clutch of the times when a character says '*centuries*'. The spoken narrative is fragmented second by second

Elizabeth Price
Sleep 2014 video

'How to Construct a Time Machine' installation view

with dizzying switches of image, whereas a wordless action scene will get to run on intermittently, making for an effective deconstruction of pace as well as narrative.

By way of a jocular twist, I presume, a 1952 filmed performance of John Cage's *4'33"* is installed next to the high-decibel percussion of Edgar Cleijne and Ellen Gallagher's *Nothing Is*, 2013: the ambient sound of the performance – which Cage sought to bring to the fore – is overtaken by the ambient sound of its installation environment. Yet why is the room also shared with Elizabeth Price's new film *Sleep*, 2014? That should be a highlight, and is accordingly heralded as 'immersive' by the wall text – but that would have required hearing it without disturbance. That aside, its ten minutes show the artist moving in typically sharp staccato edits from lessons in speed reading to an archive of thousands of images of the sun. Not only do they cover the whole of the 20th century, they 'overcome the interval of night' by compiling photographs taken from all around the world. Price reaches the conclusion that 'our dolorous animation is a reprise of a reprise' – there is nothing new under the sun, it seems, and a hundred years' worth of its stream is called up to illuminate something as banal as stock images of hosiery models...

Sleep (the title refers to a computer in a state of readiness) fits most readily into the examination of how we attempt to order the world by recording its passage – the sun being the primary measure for that – and several other works successfully underline the subjectivity involved. Jim Campbell's elegant *Untitled (for the Sun)*, 1999, is a customised LED display which shows what percentage of the day's light remains, making the sun's link to our time measurement explicit, while tweaking it. Going back to Smith's challenge, I was at the show while the proportion of the day's light used moved from 75% to 90%. Martin John Callanan also feeds real-time events into an electronic display: his *Departure of All*, 2013, imitates a flight departure screen but taps in to the internet to show us every international departure: the totality of a system is made visible to ominous and environmentally troubling effect as we see just how many flights are leaving right now. Tehching Hseih's canonical *One Year Performance 1980-81 (Time Clock Piece)*, in which the 8,760 images of him punching a clock every hour are shown for a second each, leads to a flickering record like the sun in *Sleep*, and is set close enough to a 20-year-old On Kawara date painting, *27 AG. 1995*, to make the one look like a slowed or accelerated version of the other.

A further effective sub-plot is how past views of the future, from around 1900 and 1960, are played into our current perspective as illustrations of time travelled in the spaceship of the gallery. To Jarry and Wells (*The Time Machine* was first published in 1895) we can add the first use of reversed footage in a film (*Demolition of a Wall*, 1895, by Louis Lumière), the first sci-fi film (Georges Méliès' *Trip to the Moon*, 1902) and the Victorian tendencies of Matt Collishaw, whose *Magic Lantern Small*, 2010, is a zoetrope. In addition to Marker and the 1960 filter on Wells, we have the first episode of Dr Who from 1963 and Mark Wallinger's mirrored version of his TARDIS (*Time and Relative Dimensions in Space*, 2001) 'simultaneously disappearing into the space-time continuum and reflecting its own surroundings', as Smith puts it. Overall, then, this mix of familiar recent work and more surprising historical conclusions makes for an interesting show, even if marred by its presentation. ■

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Sarah Sze

Victoria Miro London 29 January to 28 March

In a recent book of essays, *Where I'm Reading From*, Tim Parks challenges the orthodoxies of literary fiction, arguing that what 'the reading public' means and reads must be rethought. He claims that the constant info-stream, giving us a reading experience of 'all feedback and no feed', will change what the novel delivers. Sarah Sze's installations highlight the necessity of pressing the pause button to determine how global mass communication is shaping our intake and our interactions. As we witness the death of quotidian print media, 'Calendar Series, July 14-October 16', 2013-15, does this to tremendous effect. The work spreads across the floor of the vast gallery, the front and back page of each edition of the *New York Times* from this period laid out, some under desk lamps. The immediate impression is of a library: the studious air, the pools of light on printed archive and the pages signalling workspaces. Sze has excised the original news images and replaced them with abstract photographs of rock, water, ice, fire, sky and space. As the viewer has to bend or crouch to read the captions, the mood changes to one of reverence and the images of rock surfaces take on the solemnity of headstones. Sze's palette mood graphs from cool, grey resilience to agitated, burning panic. Objects, such as painted wood, shredded material, blue foam and small rocks, are placed on the displays, making the headlines appear as titles: 'Climate Panel Cites Near Certainty on Warming' or 'A Surface Calm, Punctured by Artillery and Weary Arguments'. Mentions of poverty, disease, immigration and climate crisis reverberate in a stealthily apocalyptic way, yet this is all 'old news'. Sze presents a powerful examination of how facts become artefacts, forcing us to stop and reconsider the relationships between text and truth, image and action.

A clock of a different conceptual order is presented in 'Midnight Series', 2014, in which the artist collected the front page of a major newspaper on New Year's Day from each of the 12 time zones and