

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: INFINITY IN TIME AND SPACE
Irem Mangitli, Master of Fine Arts, 2004

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In the research process of this thesis, my practice has developed from small-scale two-dimensional prints, photographs and advertisements to life-size installations of video editing, animations and digital photography. In other words, this thesis is an exploration of three-dimensional space based on visual perceptions of geometrical and chaotic imagery. “Time as a pattern” and “time as a space” are the two major concepts discussed in my work. It investigates the effects of digitally manipulated images incorporated into animated video projections changing with time in a certain space to argue the significance of infinity. It has an intense effect of making people interact unconsciously with the artwork itself by both physically and visually challenging them in an isolated space full of obstacles. Interactivity plays a big role in the presentation of my work to engage the observer and to keep him conscious about the relationship between time and space.

This thesis also talks about the ways of creating synchronization for the audio and visuals. Computer generated images forming abstract landscape illusions are harmonized with digitally produced irritating sound effects to build a claustrophobic atmosphere. To maintain that disturbing and annoying ambiance, I study the behavior of light and shadow and their relation to time and space. Eventually, I create two room-sized installations to give you an idea about the significance of the subject matter. These dark rooms consisting of cubes in the interior are divided into segments to play with the idea of space. The basic idea behind this is to force the viewer to experience the relationship between time and space by interacting with it.

INFINITY IN TIME AND SPACE

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2004

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Visual communication is enjoying the possibility of being creative all the time. That's what I am educated for. As a graphic designer who had focused on the study of communication of two-dimensional graphic imagery such as advertising, digital typography, computer illustrations, package and publication design, I can certainly tell that communication does not have boundaries.

I find Graphic Design as an innovative process that combines art and aesthetics to enlighten, influence or persuade a particular viewer. The works that I have done previously had the power of traditional design feel to it within the limits of design principles. Although they had an artistic dominance in terms of their originality, they were highly reliant on basic standards. The layouts of my works were ideal in design values but they are sometimes too formulaic and predictable, which makes the design tedious and monotonous. With all these in mind, I decided to broaden my vision both artistically and technically.

Having grown up by watching different types of two and three-dimensional animations, I have always wanted to go into this field. In view of the fact that we are living in a computerized world, an interest in digital graphic design began to flourish in me. I was fascinated with the striking effects of interactive media, animation, video and sound editing. Discovering the features of interactivity and creating animated computer graphics was the beginning of my research in digital world. Having started with short independent simulations I had the opportunity to realize that the role of graphic designer is very miscellaneous and compound. The basic principles of creating a high-quality design were still applicable but because it's a whole new media that I was dealing with, I

found it very challenging; challenging in a way to improve my abilities and to discover new forms and structures in the creative process in a short amount of time.

I have always found time insufficient to do the things I want. I feel like there should be more than twenty-four hours in a day. We keep running around from one place to another everyday, trying to catch the moment or sometimes trying to run away from it. We are usually dragged and carried away with time without even noticing what we are missing in that flow. This makes me think that I am trapped in time and space most of the time. These thoughts bothered me for the last couple of years so I began to direct and condense my works on this topic.

The book on this matter, which is called “Einstein’s Dreams” by Alan Lightman, showed me the way to consider different viewpoints about time, infinity and their connection with space.

“In Einstein’s Dreams it is 1905 in Berne Switzerland, and a young patent clerk is dreaming wonderful dreams about the nature of time. He is finishing work on an idea of his he calls the “special theory of relativity,” and every night for the next 30 nights, as he struggles with his ideas, he dreams. In every dream world he visits, time operates differently. In one world, time is circular, people repeating their triumphs and mistakes over and over... In another, there is no time, only frozen moments. This book is an account of those dreams, an account that probes your idea of time, of possibility, of chance. The illusive image Lightman slowly builds in your imagination is of the very essence of time itself.”¹

¹ Posted at: <http://www.txtwriter.com/Bookshelf/bookreviews/Einsteinsdreams.html>

After reading the book, I started to think of time as an endless pattern. I consider it as a round shape, like a circle, which does not have a beginning or ending point. And if you want to travel around on that circle you will pass from every point over and over again. In other words, you will experience the same period of time again and again just like an illusion of déjà vu. Nothing is still on this planet, everything changes its position constantly and we are not capable of preventing it to flow away. Sometimes we only stay aside and watch what is going on in our lives, like an outside viewer. As Alan Lightman said in his book:

“In a world of fixed future, life is an infinite corridor of rooms, one room lit at each moment, the next room dark but prepared. We walk from room to room, look into the room that is lit, the present moment, then walk on. We do not know the rooms ahead, but we know we cannot change them. We are spectators of our lives.”²

“Einstein’s Dreams” is the book that inspired me. It gave me many compelling ideas about the relationship between time and space and helped me to express myself artistically.

To state my thoughts, I started with taking digital pictures of daily objects such as; trash, clothes, bike wheels, pipes, dishes etc. I was interested in everything around me because each living and non-living thing is part of our lives. By manipulating many of those different photographs digitally, I created imagery that looks familiar but also indefinable in shape. These solid black and white images are then turned into scenery collages afterwards. I call them “mental photographs”. Since I was young I used

² Alan Lightman, *Einstein’s Dreams*: Warner Books, New York, 1994

to memorize moments, things, events and people as scenes like photographs. The major things about those moments would stay as a snap shot in my mind. A scene of a happy moment that is always clean and transparent as water, detailed as an artwork or an unwanted reminiscence, which is mostly fuzzy and indescribable. So in a way these big screens of snapshots of moments taking place in space and time as a memory are turned into indefinable, old looking black and white images.

While working on these I became influenced by the works of New York based installation artist Devorah Sperber. In her works, she explores repetition by using thousands of digital pictures of everyday objects. She creates realistic images of seamless collages made out of photographs and then transfers them to clear photographic film. The idea of creating a collage out of hundreds of different pieces and creating a whole new image reminded me about this aspect of time; every person has the same type and amount of dough to play with but every individual is different. Their thoughts, beliefs and talents are likely to shape the dough, so the final product is unique. The principle is the same when it comes to moment; everybody gives a different direction to time according to himself. In other words, we are changing the flow of the time as individuals. This is one of the main points of my thesis, the interaction of people with my work.

Looking deeply into Sperbers' works and keeping Einstein's Dreams in mind, I created a walk-in installation. As I mentioned before, the feeling of being trapped in time and space made me create an isolated room that has certain boundaries to emphasize the restrictive and dull side of time; a large cube built in a dark room. Because time is extremely powerful I decided to represent it with a large cube made out of steel pipes. A cube without walls emphasizes that it is suitable for every kind of interaction from the

outer world; like an invitation for people to go inside, experience the instant, even alter it with their presence and shadows and take part in that specific area and phase. This cube is divided into segments by triangular shaped planes made out of semi-transparent fabric. The reason for using this fabric is that it allows the projection of the same animation through different planes to create a multiplicity of the abstract illusion of time and space and also to show that many things are going on in separate layers around us. In other words, the same image is being seen through other spaces and we decide to choose to see various things at the same time or to focus on one precise section. These large flat surfaces are placed at various angles, overlapping each other in order to challenge people while they are walking through the cube. They are also used to show the connection between digitally manipulated collages of landscape views and the landmasses of space.

After setting up the room, I created moving computer graphics of digitally manipulated photographs of indefinable geological forms. This animation of high contrast colored graphic images is very dynamic in speed to demonstrate the idea that we are dragged in time from one spot to another without even noticing the details of the things around us. Images changing very fast emphasize the difficulty of catching the fine points of the moment, the mental photographs I have been talking about. They repeat themselves as a cyclical movement to emphasize the repetitive, restrictive and infinite aspects of time. This animation is projected from the ceiling through the cube, so the chaotic moving images, whose speed is changing over time randomly, are reflected on the planes of the cube and on the floor. The projection looks like a light show creating interesting shapes and shadows on unusual surfaces and the people walking inside the

cube. Even though it is a black and white animation it becomes colorful with the interaction of people.

I also added a digitally produced, annoying ambient sound track for the background. This monotonous sound is always present in the setting and it supports the installation in a way to keep the atmosphere very claustrophobic, oppressive and irritating. The aim of this whole scene is to pull people towards the corridors of the cube, force them to go in, walk around the flat surfaces and experience the light and shadow in conjunction with the sound to make them feel like they are taking part in a certain division of time and space.

The way I create isolated and depressive spaces are very similar to the Soviet artist Ilya Kabakov.³ His room installations such as “The Rope” and “The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment” influenced my work in particular. He has been active in building politically dominant installations with a narrative technique of mixing pictures, everyday objects and words. The rooms he created are small and oppressive like mine. The difference is, he is creating these rooms by first challenging people, getting their ideas at the first place. He places importance on knowing how people react to certain set ups, he takes notes about their actions and then creates his works. In other words, the viewer takes part in the artwork before it is formed, but I prefer people to interact with my work after it is complete.

The reason for choosing time as a concept for my works is that I feel like I am lost in time and space most of the time. I keep trying to catch the moment but it is impossible, time is running away from me, trying to leave me behind. Sometimes I do not

³ Edited by James Lingwood, *Ilya Kabakov -Ten Characters*: ICA, London, 1989

know who or where I am. Everything I see around me, things, people etc, they are all familiar but I cannot tell what and who they are exactly, just like the graphical images used in this structure. It can be very scary if you do not know what you are looking at, reminiscent of a young child who is scared of the darkness. All these fears and feelings showed me the way through the construction of these pictures.

The second room I created consists of four large-scale transparent plates hanging from the ceiling forming a cube shape. They have the same sense of a collage of indefinable graphic images, similar to the ones I used for the first piece, but these give the impression of aerial photographs or map like images. These see-through pictures are used to support the video piece projected on the floor, which is a birds-eye view of indescribable graphic images. The use of cubic space and the video projection is basically based on the same objective, the interaction of people. The viewer can either go inside the cube, step on the projection to join the vista or just go around the pictures, look at them and be an inactive participant in that particular space.

As Alan Lightman says “No one is still”.⁴ We are all changing and improving every moment as time passes. For me, it is a development of my artistic skills, over the past two years. I have had the chance to discover and express myself in a whole new and different world. Having a graphic design background helped me a lot in this exploration process by making me not only look but also see beyond the dimensions of rules of design.

⁴ Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*: Warner Books, New York, 1994

REFERENCES

- Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*: Warner Books, New York, 1994
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