Independent Project

View to Infinity

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Abstract

A concept known as “The Loop” has been used by a number of artists in a variety of media. In addition to historic use in myth and oral tradition, the loop became increasingly popular in twentieth century literature and cinema. More recently, this theme has been adopted by visual artists and put to purpose in static and kinetic artwork. Though motivation and meaning are unique to each product, they share a commonality in that they break through standard three dimensional perception. This extraordinary innovation is made possible through the acquisition and manipulation of time. When examining the essentially unconscious use of the loop concept in my own work, I discovered my personal fascination with this elemental continuum. After viewing the work of several artists and considering their methodologies, I began to review my body of work to determine how extensively I had employed the loop. I found the first occurrence of the concept in a short story, written when I was sixteen. I have no memory of what may have inspired it, but while perusing journals and drawings from those years, I found several examples which utilize looping elements. It was a surprising discovery, largely because I was unaware of these inclusions prior to a few weeks ago. This independent project is the result of my search for understanding in the work of others, for engagement with previous incarnations of my own work, and for the revelation of how the loop might inform my art today. For all intents and purposes, it is a journey through time.

Through the examination of others’ work, we find echoes of ourselves. There are several contemporary artists who actively harness the power of time and the dynamics of the loop. One of the most adept is Paul Pfeiffer, a filmmaker, editor and visual artist. Pfeiffer explores issues of race, religion, identity, fear and sacrifice. By using cinematic media and graphic manipulation, the artist transforms mass media into intimate response. He exploits public access to spectacle and explores opportunities for paradigm shift. In Pfeiffer’s work titled *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)*, 1999, he uses stock footage of an African American basketball player to invoke a connection between the exploitative nature of professional athletics and the heinous injustice of slavery.

These unfortunate parallels in turn make clear that Pfeiffer’s work is less about erasure and absence – key words that recur within and dominate the literature on Pfeiffer – than it is about excess and abundance, the surfeit of meaning within an image, and the politicized consequences of seeing one image through the lingering trace of another. In sum, although aspects of the original footage have seemingly disappeared, in reality they remain, both behind *Fragment*’s surface and upon it, animating Pfeiffer’s video and complicating it, profoundly, from within (Wallace, 2012, p. 237).

The cinematic medium has extraordinary potential in invoking the dimensional shift of time. Not only does it require the expenditure of time by the viewer, it has the capacity to transform perspective and regress to a predetermined point along the continuum. In the case of *Fragment*, Pfeiffer transcends the passage of more than a century and draws the viewer back to a time when human life was available for purchase. Furthermore, the parallels suggest that time has not brought change, that this condition actively persists, that the triumphant athlete is a victim to the same demoralizing system.

Artists utilizing any medium have the opportunity to engage in significant social commentary and inspire active response through their choice and treatment of subject matter. Multicultural explorations can engender respect and acceptance of those who have alternate beliefs. The incorporation of new ideas by an open minded populace can actively benefit all of humanity. The positive influence of such artwork can be compounded by an educational system which supports and expands multicultural themes.

For Banks, multicultural education is about truth, a more authentic truth about the many contributions and stories of the people who make up America. These stories and contributions have been left out of the history books and literature anthologies until recent times. Everyone needs to know the reconstructed histories of this country in order to have a more realistic picture of how this country developed (Delacruz, 1995, p. 58).

The artifacts and artwork of all cultures can provide insight into value systems such as, economy, government, tradition and religion. The study of these materials and their implications for members of the society can lead to greater understanding. The ultimate goal is the erasure of cultural divisiveness and the obliteration of prejudice. By developing an inclusive community which celebrates the individual strengths of each member, we can advance together regardless of race, creed, gender, sexual orientation or economic background. As art educators, we can advocate for the adoption of these principles and as artists we can provide an example for others to follow. To inspire change, we must model the behavior we wish to inspire. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi, each of us must BE the change we wish to see in the world.

In developing my artwork for this project, the concept of time and the desire for social harmony consistently recurred in my mind. I am the peacemaker of my family, looking for paths of compromise in any given debate. The therapist, problem solver and calm, quiet voice are roles I embrace. Much of my world occurs through inner monologue and contemplation. I was fortunate to have several teachers who guided my understanding of others. In this aspect, Doctor Scott Olsen was an invaluable resource. His class on comparative religions affected my life in ways I did not comprehend until much later, possibly not until undertaking the introspection which inspired this project.

One of the concepts which resonated deeply is that of infinity. I had always found the linear progression of time, culminating in revelation and rapture, a rather disturbing idea. Lying in the grass, climbing a tree, swimming in the ocean, those were the moments which I felt closest to the divine. That the same presence which created these glories was ultimately determined to destroy them, was something I could not reconcile. When introduced to the concept of infinity and its interpretation of cyclical time, all things in continuity, I was fascinated. It was this message, accepted by cultures around the world, I resolved to convey in my art project.

The form of the image is a traditional mandala, structured incrementally in 360 degrees. The radial symmetry of such images is meant to invoke the sacred circle, the wheel of *samsara*, the transition of karmic form. The symbols which make up the structure are derived from a variety of cultures. In the center is the Sanskrit symbol, the *ohm*, unifying resonance chanted to yoke the body, mind and soul. It is encircled by the color violet, representing the crown *chakra*, that of enlightenment, the thousand petal lotus, the *sahasrara* (Smith, 1958). Moving out from the center circle, there are Celtic knots, symbols without beginning or end. I have used green for two reasons. The first is to show deference to the growing renewal of the Earth, the color also connects to both the center symbols. It represents the heart *chakra*. Beneath the knots, the Greek key repeats in another unbroken symbol. The colors here are of lower *chakra*. This is due to the symbolic connection of the Greek Key with the wheel of *samsara*, the return to earth for karmic regeneration (Monti, 2002). The next level of the mandala is the lotus blossom. “The Hindu sees in the lotus the symbolism of superhuman or divine birth, the flowering of the human spirit. To the Buddhist, it suggests benignity, spirituality, perfection and immortality” (Wood, 2012). The color is blue, that of the mind *chakra*. The symbol of Yin and Yang, revered by Taoists, encompasses the lotus at twelve intervals.

Each invades the other’s hemisphere and takes up its abode in the deepest recess of its partner’s domain. And in the end both find themselves resolved by the circle that surrounds them, the Tao in its eternal wholeness. In the context of that wholeness, the opposites appear as no more than phases in an endless cycling process, for each turns incessantly into its opposite, exchanging places with it (Smith, 1958, p.214).

Bordering the Yin Yang is the mathematical representation for infinity. The symbols have alternated color and orientation to represent the disagreement over their origin. Various scholars have identified them as Phoenician, Arabic and Greek. Finally, the exterior symbol, that which embraces the whole, is the one with which we began, the *ohm*. Its color is blue, a statement of the mindfulness and respect with which the mandala was conceived.

My desire to reconcile the cyclical perception of time and infinity has led me through a personal journey of cultural practice and spiritual belief. It is a path I began long before I could articulate what drew me along. Now that I have had cause to reflect, I believe my use of the loop has been the manifestation of a deeper desire for unity. These symbols and images which I am so often drawn seem to reverberate with certainty. I hope to BE the change I wish to see in the world, to exemplify peace and the absence of animosity. In the din of rancor, may a quiet voice inspire calm. Namaste.

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