2015
TWO MAKES THREE
by
TYLER WOLFF LESLIE

Approved:

___________________________________________
Jon Swindler, Major Professor

___________________________________________
Date
I aim to take two things and make a third thing that yields a whole, which is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

(Johnson)
PERSONAL STATEMENT

As a child, I was raised to view my own spirituality within the scope of a Western tradition. I was raised to filter my own mortality through a sense of gratitude for an all-powerful and omniscient being whose sacrifices would provide me with my own salvation. I was told that this spirit was always with me, although I never found it physically or visually perceptible. I learned through stories, songs and images that all were meant to exemplify certain moral codes, those of which I was instructed to wholesomely follow. It was possible to question these fables and traditions, however whenever I doubted these teachings I was always supplied with an answer that was not to be denied.

I never felt satisfied with this relationship. I was never able to accept my given spiritual authority as absolute and infallible. I could not bring myself to accept what I did not feel as certain. I have always been more comfortable with a sense of uncertainty for that which I could not perceive.

My personal spiritual awareness is in a state of constant change. I am continually greeted with moments of belief and disbelief with no foreseeable sense of rhyme or reason. My spiritual barometer has no fixed point of measure and my song has not yet found its own fundamental rhythm. I am frustrated with this temperament, but at the same time I am made more self-aware by it. I am recurrently moved closer to and farther from moments of spirituality; even so, I choose to maintain a mode of seeking. I yearn for a deeper sense of my own spiritual spectrum -- moments of clarity and obscurity, of transparency and opacity. I move through the world in search of my own
spiritual palindrome, of my own symmetry and equinox. As a result of this curiosity, I aim to make artwork that best indicates and absolves me of this research.

I am interested in exploring ideas of an individual’s spiritual experiences as they relate to visual perception, consciousness, form, print processes and the moving image. Moreover, I base my work on a relationship of binary correspondence. I set up visual situations wherein my work describes two characters or figures, of a varying level of depiction, that are made to operate and overlap within the same compositional space. These two figures ultimately combine to form a third kind of relationship. It is this third thing that serves as a metaphor to my personal sense of spirituality. This relationship also provides a visual opportunity for my viewers to remain mindful of an uncertain perspective, as the polar relationship of interacting marks are seemingly not fixed.

This thesis body of work, Two Makes Three, comprised of both animation and print, concurrently serves as both a point of access to and departure from an understanding of an ethereal world. I am uncertain that my efforts will allow me to fully portray full spiritual awareness in me or my viewers, but as I continue to question and create in the name of this intrigue, I feel myself dancing more and more closely with something like an answer. Ultimately, I aim to take two things and make a third thing, a ‘tertium quid’, which yields a whole which is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Johnson). It is my belief that through making this third thing, I will inevitably ascertain my own spiritual consciousness.
INFLUENCES AND EVOLUTION

Through my experiences as a student of printmaking and other 2-dimensional art forms, I faced a struggle within the limitations of what a static image could embody. I created works that attempted to highlight an exploration of consciousness through the repetition of mark making and pattern. In retrospect, this body of work fell more in line with art concerned with optical illusion then with an exploration of my own consciousness. It did, however, force me to reevaluate the potential of a static image against that of a moving image. I started creating and researching about animations, and found that this spoke more directly to my interests relating to consciousness and spirituality. I designed and fabricated an antiquated animation mechanism, a zoetrope, which allowed me to have a distinct and physical relationship with a moving image, and with that of visual perception. This project, titled Devil's Wheel: A Zoetrope, is detailed in the images below:

![Devil's Wheel: A Zoetrope](image)

*Video Still from 'Devil's Wheel: A Zoetrope', Single Channel HD Video, 2013*
Having created a physical link of my hand to that of visual perception, I began to see what this type of work could imply about my own understanding of consciousness. In Oliver Sacks’ article titled ‘In the River of Consciousness’, Mr. Sacks describes cinematic devices and consciousness as seemingly analogous, ‘The technical and conceptual devices of cinema - zooming, fading, dissolving, omission, allusion, association and juxtaposition of all sorts - rather closely mimic (and perhaps are designed to mimic) the streamings and veerings of consciousness.’ (Sacks). Mr. Sacks goes on in his article to reaffirm his claim with the writings of the philosopher Henri Bergson. In his 1908 work, titled ‘Creative Evolution’, Mr Bergson asserts:

‘We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and we have only to string these on a becoming, ... situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in the becoming itself... We hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us... The mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind.’ (Sacks)

I began to see that through the creation of moving images, that of a cinematographical kind, my work could more fully investigate both consciousness and visual perception simultaneously.

Soon after I finished creating this mechanism I discovered the ‘The Dover Boys’, an animation made in 1942 by Chuck Jones. This short animation is noted for its particular use of what is called ‘smear animation’. This style utilizes a very rapidly paced depiction of movement, wherein the character in the animation is drawn to quickly rush between two disparate behaviors. This type of sequencing is outlined in the following image:
I became fascinated with this strategy of depiction. I began asking myself a
number of questions, such as: What is the potential of a form that can quickly coalesce
on opposite sides of a compositional space? How might my work benefit from this type
of animation? The answers lay in those interstitial moments, in which the figure of
Jones’ animation are smeared and distorted to take on an unnatural form. Unlike the
recognizable figures illustrated at the beginning and end of the ‘smear animation’, the
misshapen figures visible through the middle of the sequence are not able to be
understood for their drawn contortions. I was only able to recognize the significant
moments of this animation when the entire sequence was made still. I felt that this lack
of clarity paralleled my spiritual uncertainty. Neither Chuck Jones’ smear animations, nor my own personal spiritual resolutions are fixed or quantifiable. Neither are able to be frozen into discrete moments for the purpose of criticism or study, rather they exist as an ever-moving experience. Between the two moments of clarity in the animation sequence shown above, a third moment is made. A third thing is present here as well.

In hopes of further understanding the relationship that a smear animation could have with that of spiritual consciousness, I created a series of GIF animations that I hoped would help clarify what I was seeking. The most obvious and perhaps direct example of this exercise is pictured below in a frame taken from a GIF titled ‘Vibrato’.

Animation still from ‘Vibrato’, GIF, 2014
In this GIF, I mimicked the empirical style of investigation as seen in the previously mentioned study of “Dover Boys’. I animated a single line to shake and reverberate in place within a larger grid of its own potential sequence. From left to right, and top to bottom, the animated figure was seemingly frozen in time, but shaking with its own potential energy. I wanted to recreate what I felt to be the third moment of a smear animation, that of the middle ground between two fixed points of a figures’ movements. The GIF was designed to loop indefinitely, which created an opportunity for its own motion to seem infinite and more irresistible. The impact of this short looping animation, of a single reverberating line, became an initial entry for me to visually represent what consciousness might look like.

Additionally, I felt that a representation of this fashion could also begin to function as a moment of devout prayer or meditative exercise. I was now able to present an image to my viewer wherein they could continually observe a short animation that was capable of both empirical study and hypnotic rumination. At the time of this GIF’s manifestation I was reading ‘Franny and Zooey’ by J.D. Salinger. In the first section of this novel, the protagonist Franny is explaining to her boyfriend about an alternative philosophy on prayer that excites her. I related this philosophy of repetitive prayer to that of my investigation of a looping GIF animation. Franny describes the philosophy:

“...if you keep saying that prayer over and over again - you only have to just do it with your lips at first - then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self-active. Something happens after a while. I don’t know what, but something happens, and the words get synchronized with the person’s heartbeats, and then you’re actually praying without ceasing. Which has a really tremendous, mystical
effect on your whole outlook. I mean that’s the whole point of it, more or less. I mean you do it to purify your whole outlook and get an absolutely new conception of what everything’s about.” (Salinger)

Salinger’s description of this prayer system’s relationship to that of spiritual salvation or awakening provided me with an opportunity to view my own cyclical animations as one in the same. I have never kept up a personal practice of prayer, but my investigations with animation could now serve to access a greater level of spiritual devotion and understanding of my own consciousness. The recursive and cyclical design of my GIF animations could now serve a more significant purpose.

Simultaneously, as I discovered this J.D. Salinger work, I was also studying a great Buddhist text, ‘The Heart Sutra’. This is a text that belongs to the Perfection of Wisdom belief system of Buddhism. This doctrine is another example of a prayer system that can be best understood through its practice and repetition -- one’s intellect alone will not suffice. This sutra purports that there are two ways in which we can understand the world, as relative and absolute.

The Heart Sutra tells us that we can view the world relatively, wherein we can perceive the world as being made up of many distinctive things. This sutra also claims that it is also possible to view the world in an absolute manner, in which the world consists of no distinctive things. This contradiction is described in the following excerpt of the text, ‘Matter is empty. Emptiness is matter. Emptiness is not other than matter. Matter is not other than emptiness. In such a way feeling, concept and the dispositions, and cognition are empty’ (Schopen). The sutra also goes on to declare that, ‘There is no suffering, and its arisal, and its cessation, and the path. There is no knowledge. There is
no attainment. There is also no non-attainment’ (Schopen). This philosophical
discrepancy is inspiring to me. It presents a polarized relationship in which belief exists
between a conventional and absolute state. Although, I do not claim to fully understand
the sutra in its ethereal doctrine, the space that it creates between these two antithetical
positions conceptually and visually resonate with me. I believe my own sense of
consciousness and spirituality to exist within this disparity. This space between these
two polar views, is a third space, one in which my animations, drawings and personal
research all focus on.

TWO MAKES THREE: ANIMATION AND PRINT WORK

Animation Stills from ‘Two Makes Three’, Single Channel HD Video Loop, 2015
In this series of work called ‘Two Makes Three’, which includes a long-format looping animation and several prints of varying methods, I aimed to build a visual collection of my investigations into what a third thing could look like. I wanted to develop a simple and well-designed body of work, that illustrated some form of interaction between two disparate elements. I chose to let the colors blue and red, in both the animation and print work define these different elements or characters. I have developed these characters to describe a visual relationship of coming together and falling apart. In the above image, an assemblage of animation stills from ‘Two Makes Three’, show one example of how I hoped to achieve this relationship.

The long-format animation is hand-drawn using red and blue marker on tracing paper. The individual images were subsequently capture using scanner. I used Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Premiere to prepare the visual content of the animation, and I composed all of the audio components in software called Audacity. This animation was formulated to be viewed with no beginning or end, and contains no title screen. Essentially, I view this format as a long-form GIF animation, one in which the repeat or cycle is invisible. As a result of this, the animation’s power comes from the redundancy of its visual and audio elements.

Throughout its entirety, the animation shows a blue and red character moving towards and away from one another. The characters movements are varied, in that there are 9 sequences in which they perform a ‘dance’. These sequences repeat themselves and are animated at the same rate as one another. The blue and red elements move through a white field, baring little description or detail, yet this field acts as an area of influence over the two elements. In the example below, this animation
sequence shows a moment in which both characters are brought together. These two characters can also be interpreted as falling apart from each other. It is this variation wherein my conceptual gesture is held. In this way, I have attempted to describe a unifying and polarizing force that these two characters seem to exist within.

The visual content of the animation is paired with a soundtrack which I composed from several field recordings. I compiled these recordings over the last few years. This soundtrack contains clips of a variety of percussive noises, recordings of wild animals, man-made disturbances, and other sounds. It is filled with a cacophony of clamoring noises, which provides a varied sense of commotion. My aim with the soundtrack was to create another level of texture for the viewer to place him or herself within. Ultimately, the soundtrack reveals as a mental, non-physical backdrop for the drawn characters to exist within and in front of, acting similarly to that of the white field. At times this
relationship comes across more disjointed than at others, yielding a wide range of mental expanses.

Similar to that of the hand-drawn animation, I created a small suite of prints that attempts to deal with the same concepts of magnetism and repulsion; an association of constant state change. To make this suite I relied heavily upon two methods of printing, monotype pressure printing and relief printmaking. In both the pressure and relief prints, I employed the process colors of cyan and magenta, akin to the red and blue characters in ‘Two Makes Three’, to communicate a type of visual and conceptual system in which a third thing is explored. This third thing is made by the overlapping of those colors and field that surrounds the interacting characters. Whether it be a purple field or otherwise, this space represents my point of interest.

Moreover, in each of these prints, the printed field is depicted with a variety of depiction. The diversity of these details, whether it be in a pressure print or relief print, is a result of the chosen printmaking strategy. The amount of control I have over this detail is also dependent upon the print strategy I employ to create each image. In the images printed via monotype pressure printing, there is a greater opportunity for an unknown result to occur in the field surrounding the cyan and magenta characters. I chose to engage with the somewhat unpredictable and incontrollable affects of pressure printing, to provide myself with a creative moment of discovery. I hoped for this type of moment to further inform the rhythm of my spiritual consciousness and understanding.

In ‘Snake’, a two-color pressure print, I created an image of similar elongated, ribbon-like forms that are also present in the animation ‘Two Makes Three’. In this print work, the cyan and magenta forms overlap and interact intimately with one another. The
merger of these elements, creates a third thing. The color purple acts as the field in which these two contrasting forms exist within. In my view, the white field of the animation is analogous with the presence of the purple in this printed work. They both act as a consolidating and a divorcing energy.

Snake, Pressure Print on Panel with Plexiglass, 2015

Another example of this type of relationship, is evident in the work titled ‘Rise’. In this print, which is also a two-color pressure print, I devised a simpler and more explicit representation of a cycle. Cyan and magenta rectangles display an oblong circular shape that transitions between each hue. The color’s cycle is contained within a black field, rather than purple, creating a strong graphic space in which the transition of color functions. Although the shape of the oblong circle is not directly comparable to that of the previously mentioned work, the conceptual gesture remains analogous. Similarly,
the conceptual affects of the black field that surrounds this cyclic form is equivalent to the purple field in ‘Snake’ and white field in ‘Two Makes Three’.

CONCLUSION

It would be dishonest for me to claim that I am spiritually awakened through the making of this work. I am no more or less sentient that I was previously to its creation. I am however, closer than I have ever been in visually describing my own uncertainty. Through manifesting this body of work, I have been able to better identify and illustrate
the struggle I face within my own sense of spirit and conscious. I have made distinct choices to create a body work that draws upon both printed and animated images to help me more fully pronounce my own spiritual uncertainty. The printed work has allowed me to present these thoughts in a graphic and static manner. I feel that these printed images are an adequate distillation of my spiritual irresolution, as they are perceptively still yet visually active. The animation, ‘Two Makes Three’, also helps describe the conflicted relationship I have with my sense of spirit. It presents a clear case of my spiritual discord, one that moves continually to and away from itself.

Through the making of both the animation and print work, I am more capable of understanding the plane of thought I exist within. It is a position that is full of both doubt and of fascination, of magnetism and repulsion, of transparency and opacity, of constant change. It is within this plane where I will continue to investigate my own person, my visual expression, my spirituality, my consciousness, my third thing, my ‘tertium quid’. Simply put, I am filled with more mindfulness now more than ever before, and for that I am satisfied.
Citations


