



**BECOMING** THE **SPACE** IN BETWEEN

*A Journey of Self-Reflection & Discovery Through Time*

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**BECOMING**

**SPACE**

*Body copy set in Freight Sans Pro, designed by Joshua Darden between  
2004–2009. Quotes set in Cochin, designed by Georges Peignot in 1913,  
based on eighteenth-century engravings by Nicolas Cochin.*

*Designed by Paulina M. Johnson*

*Photography by Paulina M. Johnson & Burton W. Johnson*

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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By Paulina M. Johnson, 2017

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106° 48' 27.6012" W >

**BECOMING THE SPACE** IN BETWEEN

*A Journey of Self-Reflection & Discovery Through Time*

40° 26' 40.5276" N >

PAULINA M. JOHNSON // 2017

*A Journey of Self-Reflection & Discovery Through Time*

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*This project is dedicated to those who have traveled with me.  
Burton, Alex, Austin, Eduardo & Irma. Thank you for your  
endless love and for always believing in me. Your support,  
through the winds and the currents of this expedition, made  
it feel safe and undoubtedly possible.*

*I love you.*

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## PREFACE

*Steamboat Springs, Colorado*

*October 2017*

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ALL OF US ARE IN A CONSTANT STATE OF **BECOMING**. We shift anew, moment by moment, from who we were, to who we are, continually morphing with the nuanced passing of time. ‘Becoming’ is a constant in everyone’s life, subject to the inevitable ebb and flow of change that comes with being alive. It is a process that bridges the complexity of past identity with the unexpected simplicity of present being. Collectively, it is living, loving, sharing, hoping, dreaming, and experiencing a full spectrum of both the awesome, and the not so awesome, aspects of life. Yet, although seemingly linear, truly knowing the full length of one’s life path, and understanding how it has shaped us into who we currently are, can be unexpectedly tricky. At least it was for me.

*“Make an empty space in any corner of your mind, and creativity will instantly fill it.”*

*— Dee Hook*

During my first semester as a graduate student at VCFA I was granted the opportunity to create design, create art, solely for my own personal exploration. I was encouraged to ‘look closely’ and practice design as a means to express my personal core values. Suddenly free from over ten years of client demands, determined concepts, creative direction, budget constraints, and constant pressing deadlines, the possibilities were endless. It was incredibly exciting. It was also mildly paralyzing. In attempting to create ‘my own’ work, I was faced with the need to explore, understand, and express myself in ways I had never felt necessary before. Perhaps I didn’t need to dig too deeply, but equipped with a newfound ability to direct my own creative and academic destiny, my curiosity led me to the edge of a precipice off of which I just had to leap. I felt that in order to create authentic work, first I had to take an honest look at myself and come to know, for better or worse, who exactly was the ‘self’ that was creating the work. I needed to know how that self had come to be and what circumstances or limitations it existed within. Little did I know that while diving off that precipice of inquiry would be incredibly difficult, it would also be immensely rewarding. Ultimately, the journey has required much support and courage, closely followed by reflection, empathy, and forgiveness.



DOCUMENTATION PROJECT, VCFA CAMPUS, 2015

That was the impetus for this project: a journey that would revisit my ‘becoming’ in order to understand my current state of ‘being’—the being that today informs my sense of beauty and guides my joy in art & design. But in order to recount the story of this journey, I needed to find a leading character. There had to be a constant: something that had accompanied me throughout the process of becoming who I am. That leading character, I realized, was space.

The concept of space, to me, is fascinating. It is elusive, grand, and all-encompassing in a way that few other concepts are. Space has an uncanny ability to mean something different to everyone, and as such, it touches the lives of all. My own personal definition is actually quite simple. Space is **possibility** and it is **love**. In its elusive in-betweenness, space has fundamentally provided me with a context in which I can consistently find the truest version of myself. Unable to fit neatly into socially defined categories, I’ve always found myself floating somewhere in between. Accepting that in-betweenness, however, has not always been easy. I spent much of my early life trying to find and define myself by referencing social categories that were never true to me or to my full experience. Today, and as a result of this project, I see that my life’s journey has been a process of detaching and then becoming something not in, but between categories, especially those I have hung onto most dearly. I now see that from that vast and undefined in-between space, my most honest creative work is able to emerge.

<b>BECOMING</b>	09	<b>FEAR</b>
	37	<b>DOUBT</b>
	55	<b>LOVE</b>
	75	<b>SPACE</b>



FIRST TIME FLYING TO VERMONT, SIDE-WAYS WINDOW VIEW, 2015



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, just over 100 years ago, then Ph.D. candidate and later art historian Wilhelm Worringer produced his doctoral dissertation. Published in 1908 and entitled ***Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style***, Worringer’s powerful thesis speculated on what he observed were the two poles of human artistic experience: **realism** and **abstraction**. Although his original intent was to comment on art of the European past, his assumptions correlated with modernist tenets that would emerge soon thereafter. Building an in-depth consideration of the two styles, Worringer focused specifically on trying to understand the psychological motivations and spiritual implications that distinguished one style from the other. Ultimately, he argued, artists who are able to empathize with nature, mesmerized by the beauty of the organic world, create art that idealizes its structure and depth in the form of realism. These artists, he believed, are at peace with the natural world as a result of their ‘advanced spiritual cognition’.

01. Worringer, Wilhelm. *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*. Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1910.

Conversely, utilizing artistic experience to gain control amidst existential uncertainty, artists who are restless within the inherent unpredictability of nature tend to create art devoid of depth in the form of abstraction. Minimizing the sovereignty of their experience, these artists create work that is informed by a ‘primitive spiritual cognition’ defined by feelings of alienation and fear. Worringer believed that an artist’s relationship with the natural world, specifically, determines the inclination towards creating art that is either vivid with realistic impressions and depth, or two-dimensional, flat, and devoid of life. Worringer concluded that **space, as an artistic element and tool to understand life experience, is both the reflection and the catalyst of all aesthetic impulses within human culture.**<sup>01</sup>

Today, Worringer’s theories mark a point of departure for my own MFA thesis. This project seeks to explore a spectrum of ideas about how we fundamentally conceive of, and relate to, space. It also embodies a journey of self-reflection and discovery regarding my ongoing experience as a creative thinker and maker. It is the culmination of a quest to understand the connection between myself and my surroundings: an inquiry into the source of my artistic inclinations from the perspective of how I understand and navigate the world around me. Likewise, it is an investigation into how my everyday relationship with space affects and informs my perception, my beliefs, my habits, and ultimately my aesthetic impulses as an artist & designer.

**Thank you** for joining me on this journey. May it spark some fun and transformative questions regarding your own path of becoming.

— Paulina M. Johnson, Fall 2017

CORNER WALL | DENVER CONDO, 2017

122° 24' 1.7028" W >

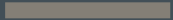
PART I // BECOMING **F E A R**

37° 47' 16.6668" N >

*“What is a fear of living?”*

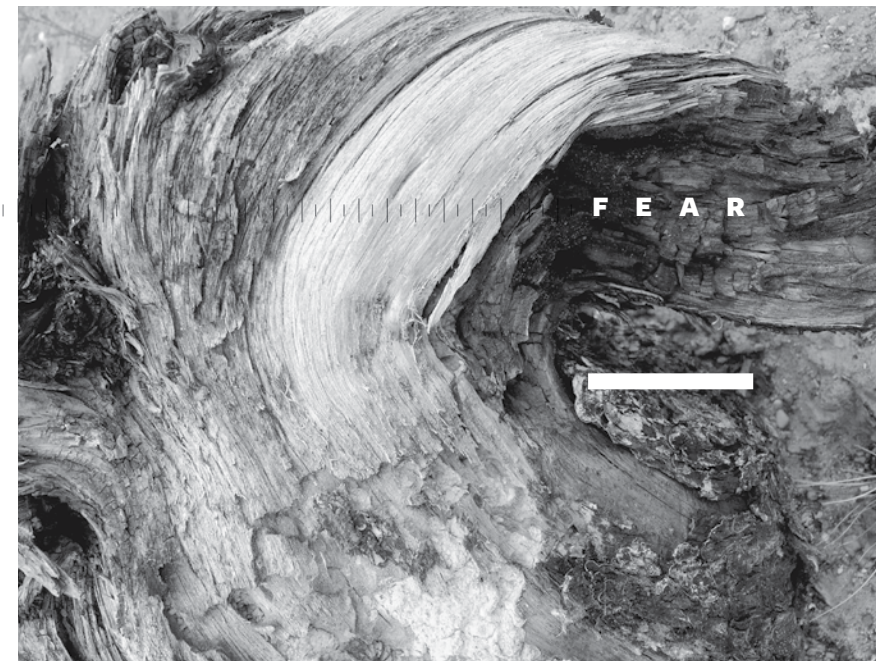
*It’s being preeminently afraid of dying.*

*It is not doing what you came here to do,  
out of timidity and spinelessness. The antidote  
is to take full responsibility for yourself—for  
the time you take up  
& the space you occupy.*



*If you don’t know what you’re here to do,  
then just do some good.”*

— Maya Angelou



TWISTING TREE TRUNK, CLOSE-UP | STAIRCASE ESCALANTE, UTAH, 2017

*“Space is the relationship between bodies,  
without which there could be no energy or motion.”*

— Alan Watts, *English Philosopher*

*fear* \ feer/ *noun*

*1. a distressing emotion aroused by  
impending danger, evil, pain, etc.,  
whether the threat is real or imagined;  
the feeling or condition of being afraid.*<sup>02</sup>

I WAS INTRODUCED TO WORRINGER’S theories during my third semester at VCFA, in the spring of 2017. Immediately, they made an impression. As an artist and designer who favors abstraction, I wondered: could feelings of alienation and fear, along with the “immense spiritual dread of space” that Worringer speaks of, truly be at the root of an artist’s tendency towards abstraction? And furthermore, could one’s relationship to the outer world either promote or appease that fear? Assuming one’s individual relationship to space is not only the catalyst of artistic impulse, but also of vastly different modes of expression, **what can artists and designers learn from the principles of spatial theory to understand their own making tendencies and, in turn, the power of their work?**

After weeks of pondering my aesthetic impulses and considering them through the lens of Worringer’s theories, I was baffled. First perplexed, then totally intrigued, I wondered, what am I afraid of?

If my natural inclination towards abstraction signifies an innate fear within me, what is the essence of that fear? What is it rooted in, and most importantly, is it real? Is it fundamentally true that because I love creating and admiring abstract work I have a conflicting spiritual relationship with the space I inhabit?

In order to grasp the breadth of these questions and the ensuing exploration of my identity as a ‘maker,’ I feel it’s important to consider a few key terms. First and foremost is the notion of ‘space.’ Space is both a relative concept and a specific term that is as much vague as it is all-encompassing. The human race has been endlessly intrigued, attempting to define and understand it as far back in time as we can conceive. Like navigating through a maze, however, the deeper one immerses into its paths, forks, corners, and hallways, the more possibilities emerge, making for a journey that is unexpectedly complex. Space simultaneously implies things and non-things. It is empty but it is filled. Space is intimately personal and undeniably political as it provides an abstract context for ideologies to emerge and subsist. Past the furthest extent of our comprehension, space (and space-time) can traverse into the depths of a completely unknown universe. It encompasses every aspect of the micro as well as the macro and is just as tangibly real as it is utterly intangible. Our collective desire to define it underlies the whole of human history, evident in our countless fields of intellectual study, evolving schools of thought, and distinct forms of creative expression.

*“The space in which we live,*

*which draws us out of ourselves,*

*in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs,*

*the space that claws and gnaws at us,  
is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space...*

*we live inside a set of relations.”*

— Michel Foucault

*space* \ spās/ *noun*

*A continuous area or expanse which  
is free, available, or unoccupied.*<sup>03</sup>

FOR CENTURIES, THE **IDEA OF SPACE** WAS SITUATED at the core of scientific discovery, especially within the realm of mathematics, physics, and astronomy. Concurrently, it became a prominent driving force behind philosophical inquiry in the realm of metaphysics and epistemology. Today, the exploration of physical space, mental space, social space, digital space, personal space, inner space, outer space, absolute space, finite space, and every other fathomable form of space, continues to provide ample room for us to question, speculate, and ponder. Yet, despite the many ways in which our understanding of space has evolved, our collective desire to define it persists. **Paradoxically, we tend to orient and define ourselves and others by referencing the very spaces we naturally inhabit, yet do not fully comprehend.**

02. “Fear.” Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. 08 July 2017.

03. “Definition of Space in English.” English Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed July 07, 2017. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/space>.

*"In the realm of becoming, but standing against the flux of time, every defined form, whether physical, mental or social, struggles to establish and maintain itself."*

— Henri Lefebvre



19  
\_74

*Henry Lefebvre*  
*Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith*

1974 46° 13' 39.4968" N, 2° 12' 49.4964" E // FRANCE

# THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

One of the most influential contemporary thinkers to consider the concept of space in a practical and interdisciplinary sense was French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In his well-known book, *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre seeks to reconcile the 'real' and practical space of scientific study with the theoretical space of philosophical inquiry. In doing so, he considers the various spatial spheres we constantly navigate. He examines not only abstract and ideological theories of these spaces, but also the physical experiences, patterns, and routines that make up our everyday living. His most lasting contribution to the realm of spatial theory is a method of categorization which has become known as the Spatial Triad. According to Lefebvre, these categories, or ways in which one can think about space, act together, indivisibly linked and dialectically informed by one another. Lefebvre's Triad can be loosely described as follows:

**Physical Space** // perceived space, or **spatial practice**, is the outcome of the choices we make and the experiences we have within physical space; in essence, it is how we use space. Its function is revealed through the process of choice and negotiation and is continually informed by new sensory experiences that arise out of navigating that space. An example of spatial practice is the route you may choose to get from any known point A to any known point B: home to work, work to grocery store, grocery store to best friend's home, etc. Whatever the point of origin and final destination may be, it's likely you have multiple options. You may choose one route because it is faster, for example. Or, you may choose a much longer route because it is more relaxing and beautiful. This is spatial practice: you have prior knowledge of each route and you make a conscious choice to physically navigate a particular one, over the other, in order to have a specific experience.

**Mental Space** // conceived space, or **representations of space**, is space as it takes the form of two-dimensional analog or digital maps, three-dimensional models, or urban plans. Generally, this is the realm of architects, urban planners, geographers, and social archaeologists, as they create representations of functional space. These representations of space exist in the mental realm as they are imagined and conceived according to specific or required functions. Low-income urban housing communities, for example, are planned and conceived differently than upper-class estate neighborhoods. While they both occupy physical space with the same general intent (to provide shelter), the way in which they are conceived of and designed is significantly different.

**Social Space** // representational space, or **lived space**, is space as it is appropriated by our imagination and ideas. Superimposed onto spatial practice, it takes on a more theoretical form rooted in meaning. Within

lived space, associations, language, signs and symbols (and the realm of semiotics) arise and subsist. Likewise, it is where ideals, protests, and social movements emerge. A simple example of this way of thinking about space could be explained through the acquired significance of a favorite place. A corner fish taco shop, for example, may be your favorite because the food is delicious, the seats are comfortable, and it was the setting of your first date with your spouse. You know the layout and the menu well and you snag that booth by the window any chance you get. From the booth, you can enjoy the artwork on the walls, hear the music, look out the window, and reminisce about your first date. Stepping back, however, what is in essence a brick and mortar structure—serving to physically separate outdoor space from a confined indoor space, and housing seemingly mundane objects such as tables and chairs—through association is now a space which holds

vast personal significance. You have appropriated that space beyond the physical navigation of spatial practice, injecting into it deep meaning. It has become part of your personal narrative: a setting within which a moment of your life has taken place and where memory can be constantly referenced.

Altogether, LeFebvre believed space is something we live within and ultimately have the power to produce. His three distinctions, then, while individually useful, become most valuable when considered as an ongoing and inseparable set of relations, simultaneously affecting one another. In his view, space is not empty, but rather full and pliable: full of potential, full of lived experience, and full of appropriated meaning.<sup>04</sup>

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04. LeFebvre, Henri, and Donald Nicholson-Smith. *The Production of Space*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1991.

space | ˈspɛɪs/ noun  
*The dimensions of height, depth, and width  
within which all things exist and move.*<sup>05</sup>

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05. "Definition of Space in English." English Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed July 07, 2017. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/space>.

**SPACE** CONSIDERED IN TERMS OF THAT which is perceived (**physical space**), that which is conceived (**mental space**) and that which is imagined and shared (**lived space**) is an interesting point of departure. LeFebvre's conceptual Triad offers a valuable lens through which the meaning and experience of space can be dissected and examined. However, for my purposes, this system of categorization seems a bit stagnant. The way in which I see, feel, experience, and consider space, especially mental space, while still differentiated to a degree, is more spiritual. I agree with LeFebvre on one point, however: that the concept of space is something we create. I do not believe this creation is always conscious, nor that the product is always obvious. Product implies the result of action, but that does not mean it has to be physically manifested at any point of the process. The extent to which we are cognizant of the space we inhabit and produce is unquantifiable, and thus it is still at the core of most philosophical quandary. Nonetheless, I believe it is something we do have agency over, conceptually, in some way.

Since *The Production of Space* was published, Henri LeFebvre's theories have informed countless disciplines. Many influential thinkers have pivoted from his ideas to speculate, in their own ways and for their own purposes, the meaning, origin, and function of space. I, too, will reference LeFebvre's spatial categories in the exploration of my own relationship to space as I question whether one, two, or an interplay of all three notions of space are the source of an underlying fear that propels my artistic inclination toward abstraction. In doing so, I will reference the terms **physical space (as context)**, **spatial practice (as action)**, **mental space** and **lived space**.





**A BRIEF HISTORICAL  
CONSIDERATION**

*“Science is the attempt to give a rational,  
rather than religious or magical,  
explanation for the order in nature.”*

— Alan J. Slavin

*space* \spās/ noun  
*An interval of time*<sup>06</sup>



BAMBOO / SHADOW INTERPLAY | HOME 2016

06. “Definition of Space in English.” English Oxford Dictionaries.  
Accessed July 07, 2017. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/space>.

Curiosity towards the mysterious inner workings of the universe, and specifically the observable phenomena of the physical world, finds its historical roots in scientific study, especially in physics, astronomy, and mathematics. All of these disciplines, while fueled by a desire to grasp the essence of nature, evolved concurrently and symbiotically with the various art periods, styles, and movements of their time. Throughout history, world cultures have conceived countless methods for explaining and documenting the natural systems they observed. The early Mayans, for example, in what is now Mexico and Central America, lived by intricate calendars, systematically plotting the movement of the sun, the moon, and the planets, which they represented symbolically. Centuries later, in Europe, “the Greeks Leucippus (~440 B.C.), Democritus (~420 B.C.) and Epicurus (~342-270 B.C.) put forward the hypothesis that matter (or space) was composed of extremely small atoms, with

different materials being composed of different combinations of those atoms.”<sup>07</sup> Concurrently, Aristotle believed everything was composed of four basic elements: air, water, earth and fire. During this time, artists created work that was a realistic, if not idealistic, representation of the human figure and its natural surroundings.<sup>09</sup> Their work “conveyed a vitality of life as well as a sense of permanence, clarity, and harmony,”<sup>08</sup> possibly inspired by the idea that space was an all-pervasive and stable entity. Thereafter, either from an inquisitive scientific perspective or rooted in artistic or religious motive, greats such as Plato, Copernicus, Galileo, René Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Noam Chomsky, and Stephen Hawking, to name a few, have contributed in their own time to the investigation, conceptualization, and portrayal of space. Throughout history, space has been consistently utilized as a tool for understanding the world.

During the 18th century, in Germany, there emerged a notable change in the way in which space was considered. Members of a new school of thought, calling themselves ‘nature philosophers,’ believed that “matter (or space) was not inert, but alive, with a universal world spirit that interconnected all forces. One member of this movement was the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who asserted that matter was governed by an interplay between innate repulsive and attractive forces. If only repulsive forces existed, all matter would disperse; if only attractive forces were present, all matter would coalesce.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, nature philosophers coincided with Neoclassicism and Romanticism in the world of art. Artists during these periods “shunned the Industrial Revolution, attacked the excesses of kings, and championed the rights of the individual. Some took refuge in nature; others sought an invigorating mixture of fear and awe in sublime landscapes and seascapes.

Imagination and nature were the wellsprings of their creativity”<sup>11</sup> as they reverted to the idealization of the human figure and of nature as the ancient Greeks once did.

Throughout this historical conversation, ‘matter’ was presumed to be either the substance that permeated every aspect of life or an absolute geometric entity. Then, in 1905, a revolutionary idea emerged. Albert Einstein published his *Theory of Special Relativity* in which space was proven to be of an entirely different nature. Einstein postulated that space is inseparably linked to, and dependent on, the fourth dimension of time. Together he called this the space-time continuum. He believed that space alone does not exist and that time is not linear. This was a counterintuitive, yet more precise, definition of two key concepts that, up until that point, had been consistently referenced in the quest to understand all of nature, physically and metaphysically.<sup>12</sup>

As Albert Einstein published his *Theory of Special Relativity* and all previous misconceptions of space were exposed, the way in which space was approached and portrayed in art also changed. Cubism, created between 1907–1914 by Georges Braque (1882–1963) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), aimed to “fracture physical reality into bite-size units” to portray figures in such a way as to showcase their every side and angle for the viewer to observe simultaneously. The work of Cubism “moved art toward abstraction by breaking down physical reality into geometric shapes, usually cubes, and then rearranging the cubes—often independently of what they represent—on a flat surface with little or no perspective.”<sup>13</sup> Cubism aimed to extract and suppress the third dimension of depth in its body of work, replacing it with an exploration of time: one which was no longer predictable or linear. Futurism, likewise, aimed to portray a sense of simultaneity in space

while embracing technology and life in a modern world.<sup>14</sup> Founded in 1909 by the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), the goal of the Futurists was to “discard the art of the past and to usher in a new age that rejected tradition and celebrated change, originality, and innovation in culture and society.”<sup>15</sup> Thereafter, and to this day, a number of other movements that dramatically reconsider the nature of space have continued to emerge, including Suprematism (the aim to convey pure feeling in art, free of preconceptions, by liberating artist and viewer of the shapes of earthly space) and Constructivism (an art movement I presume would have been a favorite of LeFebvre), which postulated that art should be approachable and functional, not purely decorative and ornate.<sup>16</sup> In art, as in science, expanded conceptions of space continue to change the way we fundamentally relate to seeing and being in the world we share.

07. Slavin, Alan J. "A Brief History and Philosophy of Physics." A Brief History and Philosophy of Physics. August 1994. Accessed July 07, 2017. [https://www.trentu.ca/physics/history\\_895.html](https://www.trentu.ca/physics/history_895.html).
08. Hemingway, Seán, and Colette Hemingway. "The Art of Classical Greece (ca. 480–323 B.C.)." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. January 2008. Accessed August 01, 2017. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tacg/hd\\_tacg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tacg/hd_tacg.htm).
09. Wilder, Jesse Bryant. Art History for Dummies. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007.
10. Slavin, Alan J. "A Brief History and Philosophy of Physics." A Brief History and Philosophy of Physics. August 1994. Accessed July 07, 2017. [https://www.trentu.ca/physics/history\\_895.html](https://www.trentu.ca/physics/history_895.html).
11. Wilder, Jesse Bryant. Art History for Dummies. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007.
12. Hawking, Stephen W., and Leonard Mlodinow. A Briefer History of Time. New York: Bantam Dell, 2008.
13. Wilder, Jesse Bryant. Art History for Dummies. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007.
14. "Futurism Movement, Artists and Major Works." The Art Story: Modern Art Insight. Accessed August 01, 2017. <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-futurism.htm>.
15. Joly, Auguste. "Futurism and Philosophy." WDL RSS. January 01, 1970. Accessed August 08, 2017. <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/20032/>.
16. Wilder, Jesse Bryant. Art History for Dummies. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007.



CHURCH REFLECTION ON WINDOW | 38TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, 2013

## SPATIAL PRACTICE / LIVED SPACE

31 |

*"Space is the outcome  
of a series of highly problematic temporary settlements  
that divide and connect things up into different kinds of collectives  
which are slowly provided with the meaning  
which render them durable  
and sustainable."*

*— Nigel Thrift, English Academic & Geographer*



CEILING, WALL, SCOUNCE, CORNER | LIVING ROOM, 2017

**Proxemics**

Latin root **prox** (proximity) +  
suffix **emics** (systemic)

1. “...the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.”

WHEN CONSIDERING MY OWN **RELATIONSHIP** TO SPACE, and its subsequent and inseparable representational qualities, many of these ideas resonate. I can see physical space as that which makes up and surrounds my body in the form of multiple types of defined volumes. Simultaneously, I can sense physical space as a three-dimensional ‘empty’ area which exists between every person and object I encounter. Thus, physical space makes up the objects themselves while also the area that surrounds them. It is divisible and quantifiable. I can accurately measure in specific units the distance between me and a wall, and the wall and a window, for example. Likewise, I can calculate my own height, weight, and through a microscope, observe my own tiny cells. For me, physical space—or in LeFebvre’s terms, its subsequent spatial practice—is indeed the sum total of sensory, quantifiable experience.

Transferring the model of physical measurements to the realm of lived or mental space, however, can be problematic. According to Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander in *The Art of Possibility*, we all live within a ‘**world of measurement.**’ In the United States, and many other parts of the world, we constantly experience evaluations, grades, scales, and assessments, from which we are judged, compared and contrasted to one another. For this reason, competition, and the tale of trial and triumph, are at the center of most cultural narratives. This measuring, however, creates hierarchies and divisions which **breed fear** and encourage **a frame of mind rooted in scarcity.**<sup>18</sup> The process of casting

17. Hall, Edward Twitchell. *The Hidden Dimension*. 1969.

18. Zander, Rosamund Stone, and Benjamin Zander. *Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Harvard Bus Review Press, 2014.

**Proxemics**

Latin root **prox** (proximity) +  
suffix **emics** (systemic)

2. “...the study of ways in which man gains knowledge of the content of other men’s minds through judgements of behavior patterns associated with varying degrees of proximity to them.”<sup>17</sup>

judgement requires us to stand back and identify ourselves as separate and detached from others, which, within lived space, isn’t always conducive to positive associations. Casting judgement drives us to attach memory (good or bad) to experience. This is how physical space, and its inherent spatial practice, morphs seamlessly into the shared social sphere that LeFebvre called lived space.

FOR ME, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT versions of physical space which differ according to the way I judge, categorize and then appropriate them. The space I experience while inside my home, for example, while physically perceived in the same way, feels different from the space I experience outside, whether in the great outdoors or within a city. Outdoor space, generally, poses no discomfort for me; on the contrary, I find myself at ease in the expanse of nature just as much as in the outdoor places and spaces that make up and surround a dense city. While I may navigate urban streets differently than, say, a desolate hiking trail, aside from

survival reflexes that may arise in response to random perceived threats, my spatial practice within outdoor space is comfortable. Moments in which I’ve experienced fear outdoors have reliably occurred in response to isolated circumstances such as coming across a rattlesnake, or having to navigate around someone’s road rage. While these events may have occurred within an outdoor space, they did not comprise or become an inherent part of my own lived space. They were merely obstacles or brief challenges, which could be surpassed and overcome through the power of choice, i.e. LeFebvre’s spatial practice. In other words, and expounding to consider the outdoors as not just physical space but also lived space, fear is not a meaning I automatically superimpose onto outdoor experience. I am not afraid of expansive open spaces; on the contrary, being outside provides me with a chance to enjoy nature, discover, and learn, which for me have great personal meaning.

BRITISH COLUMBIA BOAT IN DOCK [IMAGE BY BURTON JOHNSON], 2015



BATHROOM BARN DOOR | HOME, COLORADO, 2017

Alternatively, **indoor physical spaces conjure up completely different and more complex feelings.** Indoor physical space, for me, is wholeheartedly lived space in the sense that it contains an array of representational qualities that reflect the state of my mental space. My home, for example, is much more meaningful to me than any other indoor space. Digging deeper, however, I've observed that within my home, room by room, I seem to appropriate space and assign significance differently. My bedroom and my studio hold more value than the garage, for example, but the kitchen is equally valuable. The kitchen is our most frequented room as a family, and it is also the space we share most with others. Hence, more meaning is attached to the kitchen as it's become the physical setting of many great memories.

*"Place is the outcome of the social process of valuing space;  
a product of the imaginary, of desire,  
and the primary means by which we articulate with space  
and transform it into a humanized landscape."  
— Jaimie Gunderson*

Reflecting on LeFebvre's idea of lived space, it seems the more I appropriate a space, and particularly an indoor space, the more value and ownership I impart to that space. This sense of ownership often translates into a desire to make the space look or feel a certain way, which directly affects the way I experience that space. I am an avid cleaner and organizer, for example, but I absolutely hate cleaning and only mildly enjoy the process of organizing. Yet, in my home, I do both of these activities daily and compulsively to maintain a sense of spatial order. It's as if I have a physical need, or perhaps a mental desire, to experience lived spaces that feel open and look organized. For me, appropriation imparts agency, which translates into a feeling of power. However, maintaining a lived space according to specific standards can be exhausting, especially when that space is shared with others who may not value the same qualities within their own spatial practice. I believe each one of us affects (or disregards) our immediate physical space in such a way as to ensure our experience within mental space and lived space is comfortable. And, much as LeFebvre asserted, I agree that each form of space inevitably informs and dialectically affects the other in a continuously cyclical way.

LIGHT THROUGH GLASS CLOSE-UP | HOME MUDROOM

82° 23' 21.8688" W >

PART II // BECOMING    D O U B T

34° 51' 49.0068" N >

*"If you would be a real seeker after truth,  
it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt,  
as far as possible,  
all things."*

— René Descartes





INVERTED REFLECTION ON HALLWAY CLOCK | HOME LIVING ROOM, COLORADO, 2017





1641 52° 7' 57.4788'' N, 5° 17' 28.5576'' E // NETHERLANDS

*René Descartes*  
*Meditations on First Philosophy*  
 Translated by Laurence J. LaFleur

ROUTT COUNTY FLAT TOPS | COLORADO ROCKIES, 2015

space | spās/ noun

a : a boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction: *infinite space and time*

b : physical space independent of what occupies it —called also *absolute space*<sup>19</sup>

## MENTAL SPACE

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH PHILOSOPHER and mathematician René Descartes famously held that “while the essence of body is spatial extension, the essence of mind is thought. Thought is taken to be the defining attribute of incorporeal substance that is non-spatial in nature. He writes: *‘For if we... examine what we are, we see very clearly that neither extension nor shape nor local motion, nor anything of this kind which is attributable to a body, belongs to our nature, but that thought alone belongs to it.’*<sup>20</sup> The mental and the spatial are thus mutually exclusive categories.”<sup>21</sup>

**Mental space, then, is in itself a paradoxical term.** Descartes states that essence of mind is thought, and thought is by definition non-spatial. So how could there be such a thing as a space within which a mental product exists? We’ve already defined space as an apparently empty volume, nothingness or everything-ness, between two objects composed of matter. We’ve also considered it as a divisible, four-dimensional entity pointing to time and position. Additionally, space can be considered as a container within which activity—and thus product—occurs. This third notion, I believe, is the conceptual ground behind the idea of a metaphorical space, which has inherently no physical characteristics, but which can nonetheless encase an invisible and intangible product: the product of the mind.

19. “Space.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 05, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/space>.

20. Descartes, René, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

21. McGinn, Colin. “Consciousness and Space.” Rutgers University. Accessed July 07, 2017. <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/consciousness97/papers/ConsciousnessSpace.html>.

*"All you are is what you are during the moment you are it."*

— *Graffiti, New York Subway, 1995*



# MINDREAL

# 20

*Robert Ornstein*  
*Illustrated by*  
*Ted Dewan*

# 08

2008 | 37° 25' 38.91" N, 122° 10' 10.9884" W // CALIFORNIA



ESCALATOR, SIDE VIEW | DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT [IMAGE BY: BURTON W. JOHNSON], 2015

Robert Ornstein, in his insightful book entitled *MindReal*, generates an interesting discussion about the **mind**, **consciousness**, and **reality**. According to Ornstein, what is Real exists only in the realm of a Reality that is forever out of our reach, an unknowable, dense entity underlying the whole essence of the universe. What he calls MindReal is our humble interpretation of that Reality, one which is limited by our ability to perceive, process, and understand true Reality. MindReal is all we are ever able to know, an illusory construct based on our finite mental capacity and the quirks and mysterious functions of the mind. According to Ornstein, the mind can be defined as the physical brain and its corresponding natural processes. It is a complex neurological system responsible for accepting, filtering, and reacting to all of the information it receives via each of the five senses. The mind is in charge of managing our subconscious bodily functions and is also the source

of all our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and everything we string together through memory and *believe* to be real.

As an innate and crucial part of our human nature, the mind has evolved over hundreds of thousands of years. Today, it is an amalgamation of evolutionary adaptations that ensure both our basic survival and our continued function. Many of these adaptations, however, are now obsolete. The mind systematically (and without our explicit conscious permission) compares, categorizes, qualifies and ignores massive amounts of information, casting judgments and occasionally pigeonholing people and things. Most unfortunately, our mind labors under the illusion that it is able to think in a straight line, when the truth is, it is far more impressionable and unstable than we'd like to admit. Yet, as imperfect as our mind may be, it is the ultimate source of all our knowledge and of all our assumptions and beliefs.<sup>22</sup>

This body of knowledge, or awareness, in the form of assumptions and beliefs, is the greatest product of the mind, and it is often called our consciousness. Much like defining space, however, defining consciousness is in itself extremely difficult. In his book, *Energy Leadership*, Bruce Schneider asserts that “consciousness is the process of awareness, and the awareness of the process.” Concurrently, in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes consciousness as “intentionally ordered information” which determines the content and the quality of our lives. Because it frames our beliefs, consciousness is closely tied to spirituality, and perhaps to what Worringer called ‘spiritual cognition,’ or that which informs and guides artistic expression. It is also what I most closely associate to what LeFebvre called mental space.

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22. Ornstein, Robert. *MindReal: How the Mind Creates Its Own Virtual Reality*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Malor Books, 2010.

space | spās/ noun

An area provided for a particular purpose: a parking space.<sup>23</sup>

“Space is the physical setting in which everything occurs.”

— Lynn Meskell & Robert W. Preucel,  
*Social Archaeologists*

ASSUMING THAT **MIND** (PHYSICAL SPACE) is the particular space in which consciousness (mental space) occurs, how do they correlate to each other? Contrary to LeFebvre’s belief that mental space is only that which can conceive physical space, I believe mental space is much more complex. While still framed by our physical experiences, mental space includes all of our thoughts, our feelings, our dreams, our aspirations, our intentions, and all the aspects of what makes our identity unique. Mental space is a free and open space for thoughts to emerge and wander: our personal source of joy and creative power. Turning back to my larger question, I wonder, how is my own consciousness affected by my spatial practice within the many physical spaces I encounter and, conversely, how do those experiences affect the way I express myself through art & design?

To a certain extent, I’ve uncovered how physical space affects my consciousness. Most important is the notion of **order** and, more specifically, **visual order**. I gravitate towards creating and experiencing lived spaces that display a visual sense of pattern, a harmonious relationship between forms, and an overall sense of ordered simplicity. For me, physical order literally translates into mental order, which in turn grows into a feeling of comfort and a heightened ability to focus and concentrate.

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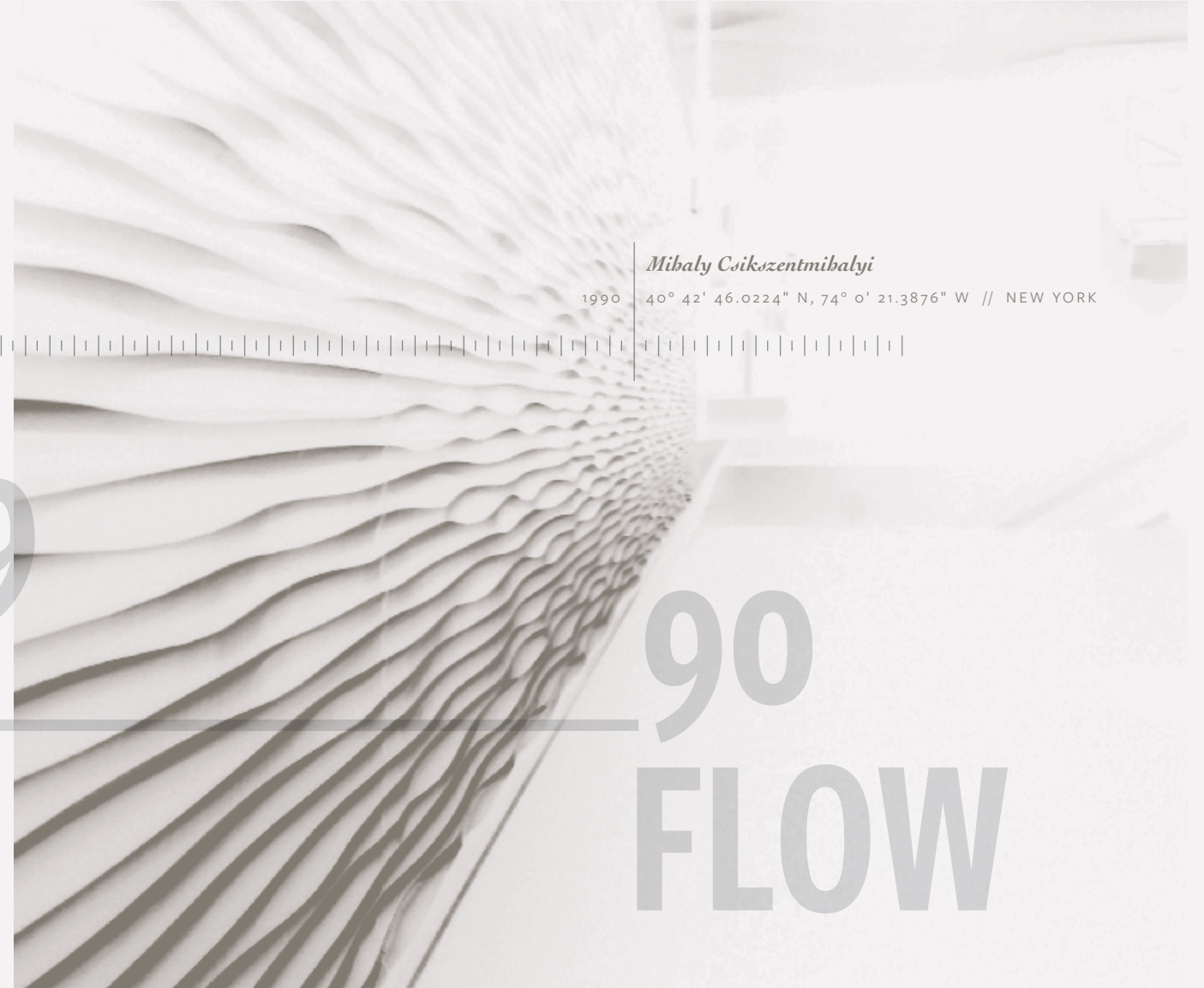
23. “Space Defined.” *Your Dictionary*. Accessed August 08, 2017. <http://www.yourdictionary.com/space>.

*"In reality there is nothing in the universe  
which is completely perfect  
or completely still;  
it is only in the minds of men  
that such concepts exist."*

— Alan Watts

19

90  
FLOW



*Mibaly Csikszentmihalyi*

1990 | 40° 42' 46.0224" N, 74° 0' 21.3876" W // NEW YORK

ENTRY HALLWAY, INVERTED | AURUM, STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO [IMAGE BY: BURTON W. JOHNSON], 2016

In his insightful book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Hungarian educator and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi asks the age-old questions, “*What is happiness?*” and “*When do people feel most happy?*” According to his findings, happiness, or “the optimal state of inner experience, is one in which there is order in consciousness. This occurs when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.” It is the product of a wholehearted, focused mind. ‘*Flow*’ is “the way people describe that state of mind when consciousness (mental space) is harmoniously ordered, and when they want to pursue whatever they are doing purely for its own sake.” Contrary to what many believe, happiness is not the result of good fortune or random chance. It is not dependent on material possessions or power. “How we feel about ourselves, the joy we get from living, ultimately depends on how the

mind filters and interprets everyday experiences.” No single external factor or event can produce happiness, only the way we choose to interpret and experience it. In other words, and once again referencing LeFebvre’s Spatial Triad, we have the power to create the content of our own lived space: the space that holds all the meaning of our lives. This process, however, entails achieving mastery of consciousness itself. Optimal experience can be reached through work, through play, through physical challenge, through personal interaction, or even through immersion in a lifelong hobby. It can be evoked by any activity which requires our full focused concentration, and in which our knowledge and physical/sensory skills match the opportunities for action. It is usually bound by parameters particular to the activity, with a specific intent or end goal — i.e. reaching the summit of a mountain, solving a difficult mathematical formula, or completing a thesis document.

The root of discontent, on the other hand, lies at the opposite end of the spectrum. According to Csikszentmihalyi, mental entropy, in the form of anger, sadness, stress, or fear, occurs “whenever information disrupts consciousness by threatening its goals.” Living in a constant state of optimal experience is, of course, unrealistic. Nevertheless, it is a worthy objective to identify, seek, and practice, as often as possible, those activities and challenges, whether mental or physical, that bring us back into the present moment and into the task at hand; to momentarily forget about physical space or time, and immerse into the core of our inner being.<sup>24</sup>

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24. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009. IBooks.

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*“We need to give each other the space to grow,  
to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to  
give each other space so that we may both give and  
receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness,  
dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.”*

— Max de Pree

**CONSCIOUSNESS**, IN ITS ETERNAL COMPLEXITY, can be considered categorically as either **spatial** or **temporal**. In the blog *August Meditations*, temporal consciousness is defined as “an awareness of change and the passing of time.” Ordinary, everyday thinking, according to this definition, is temporal by nature. For the most part, much of what we desire in our daily lives is rooted in either past experiences or future aspirations. As we contemplate and reach for those goals, we end up spending a great deal of mental energy either in the past or in the future, not in the present. As I aim to achieve a sense of order within the physical spaces I navigate, but especially those I appropriate, I reference temporal consciousness. My desire to live within an environment that is simple and ordered rises out of past, positive experiences and a desire to perpetuate more of those experiences.



In opposition to the temporal, spatial consciousness is focused not on what was, or what could be, but what *is*, right now. It is an awareness of being in the present physical moment, and nowhere else. Since the past and the future are temporal constructs, the present is the only moment that is ‘real’ and therefore it is spatial: spatial in the sense that it exists within certain physical parameters and can be located in a specific place (here) at a specific time (now).

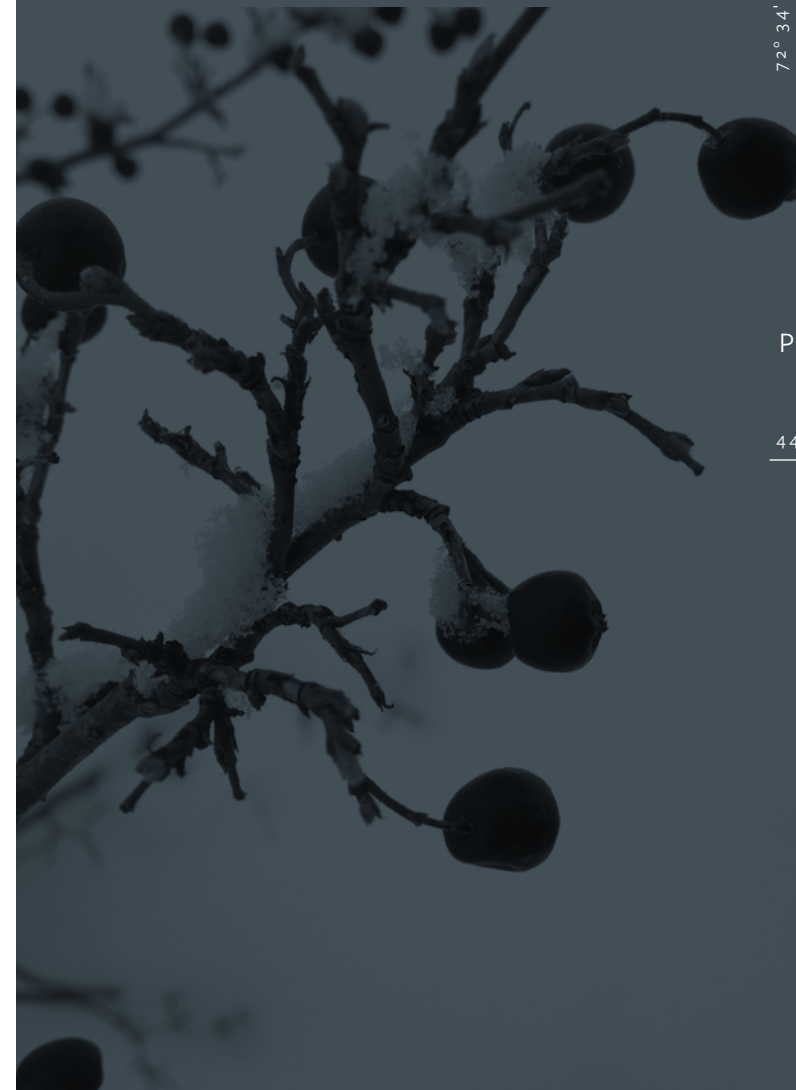
The practice of meditation, which has recently become popular in the West, aims to consciously “minimize temporal consciousness while maximizing spatial consciousness. In practical terms, this means turning attention away from thoughts that suggest process,” which, for me, happens most readily when I am fully immersed in my art practice. Intently focused on a creative task, I am able to release goals and expectations about the physical space that surrounds me. I become absorbed by the subtle movements of art-making and the feeling of inhabiting the mental space that guides them.<sup>25</sup>

25. “Spatial vs. Temporal Consciousness.” August Meditations. June 04, 2016. Accessed July 07, 2017. <https://augustmeditations.wordpress.com/2016/06/04/spatial-vs-temporal-consciousness/>.

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*“Another definition for ‘the Fourth Dimension’ is the very act of perceiving (consciousness) or feeling (sensation). Artists and writers often think of the fourth dimension as the life of the mind.”*  
 — Beth Susan Gervib-Nevic,  
 Director of the New York Arts Exchange

WINTER CHERRIES | DOG WALK, STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO



72° 34' 3.4536" W >

PART III // BECOMING    **L O V E**

44° 15' 18.6948" N >

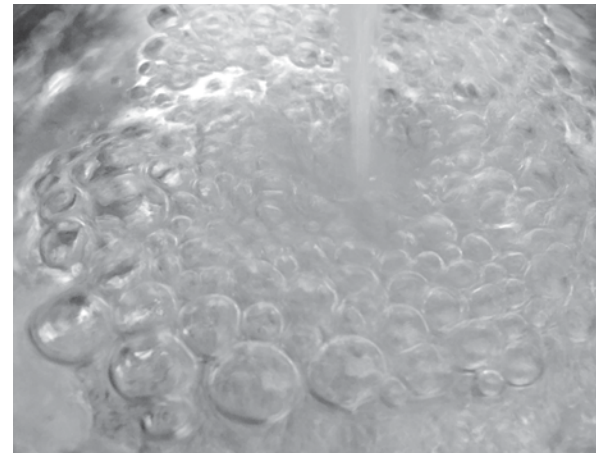
*“Between stimulus and response there is a space.  
 In that space is our power to choose our response.  
 In our response lies our growth & our freedom.”*  
 — Viktor E. Frankl



WALL CRACK MIMICS VINE | SAVANNAH, GEORGIA, 2015

A PROFESSIONAL COACH ONCE TOLD ME THAT everything we do, we do either out of love or out of fear. Considering Csikszentmihalyi's theories, I believe this idea can be reframed to say that **everything we do, we do from within a state of order in consciousness or within a state of mental entropy.** If we suppose that the inclination towards abstraction, per Worringer's conclusions, is solely motivated by a state of mental entropy (i.e. alienation and fear), does producing art devoid of three-dimensional qualities actually help put order back into consciousness? Presuming that happiness, or optimal experience, is in fact our common human goal, can artists achieve this goal simply by removing the illusion of space from their work? And in more simple and personal terms, does creating abstract work make me happy?

As I embarked on developing this thesis, I will confess that the path ahead was mostly uncertain. Each day, as I discovered and then mulled over content and ideas, I experienced what could be best described as unexpected personal epiphanies. Through the writing of this book, I've uncovered parts of myself of which I had little conscious awareness: parts that have silently framed my life experience. The first of these epiphanies is the realization that my personal affinity towards abstraction is not rooted in a need to suppress spatial depth out of fear of the world around me. On the contrary, it is entrenched in a deep love of order and an admiration of natural patterns.



WATER BUBBLES IN DOGGIE BOWL | HOME, COLORADO, 2017

*epiphany* [ib-pij-ub-nee]

*a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience*<sup>26</sup>

26. "Epiphany." Dictionary.com, Dictionary.com, www.dictionary.com/browse/epiphany.

Offering a brief respite from "representational qualities," such as content or meaning, abstraction provides me with an aesthetic platform from which the most basic forms and shapes can be used while only loosely referencing the physical space that surrounds me. On a visceral level, I find solace in working with repetition, or patterned action, because it imparts order into the depths of my consciousness. This order produces joy, comfort, security, and a feeling of being perfectly centered within my own optimal mental experience. Through repetitive motion, multiplicity, and assembly, I am able to consistently and reliably lose myself in action. For me, abstraction is not about creating work that is purposefully devoid of depth, but rather it is about honoring and inhabiting my optimal mental space: a space which is influenced and deeply inspired by the beauty and the patterns of nature.

COILED JUNK MAIL STRIPS | STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO 2016



*"Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again."*

— Joseph Campbell







*“Meditation in the midst of activity  
is far better than meditation in stillness.”*

— *Renowned Monk Hakuin*



20

*Andrew Juniper*

51° 9' 56.4876" N, 10° 27' 5.4936" E // VERMONT 2003

03

WABI  
SABI

COASTAL PLANT CLOSE-UP, INVERTED IMAGE | SOUTH CAROLINA, 2015

One of the most alluring philosophies on art-making and aesthetics I have ever encountered is the old Japanese tradition called **wabi sabi**. Guided by the philosophical theories of Zen Buddhism, which was itself deeply influenced by its predecessor Taoism, the beautiful expression of wabi sabi “challenges all of us to unlearn our views of beauty and rediscover the intimate beauty to be found in the smallest details of nature’s artistry.” Combining the worlds of art and philosophy into a symbolic whole, wabi sabi “suggests such qualities as impermanence, simplicity, asymmetry, humility, and imperfection.” It encourages us to accept things as they are, finding beauty in the truth and transience of nature. Likewise, it seeks to reach and maintain focused attention through active meditation in the form of art-making.

Space is an important element in the Japanese aesthetic of wabi sabi. It is a concept that is “more pressing in Japan than in most other countries both in physical and metaphysical terms. Physically, the mountainous regions that dominate the landscape severely limit the amount of space available for living. Out of necessity, this restriction has affected the way in which space has been used to maximize potential.” Metaphysically, and through the creation of art, the Japanese have become “masters of space, and have throughout their long artistic history stressed the importance of negative space, or nothingness, as a juxtaposition to things that presently exist.” The ebb and flow of being and not being, represented as positive and negative space in art, is a fundamental fact of life in the traditional Japanese consciousness.

Through this elemental juxtaposition, wabi sabi celebrates the reality of our own impermanence, offering ample opportunity to reassess personal values and aspirations so that they more closely align with nature. “As the silence between notes in music is vital, so the space provided in art is just as expressive, and wabi sabi has used brevity to magnify the intensity of that expression.”<sup>27</sup>

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27. Juniper, Andrew. Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2010.

## ART & DESIGN



BLINDS, CLOSE-UP | DENVER CONDO, 2017

A SECOND IMPORTANT **EPIPHANY** is the realization that **my artistic expression manifests as two very different practices: my art practice and my design practice**. At this point in time, it is difficult for me to articulate their exact similarities or differences. They are both informed by the same **personal core values\*** and underlying life experiences; both also reflect my love of simplicity, spatial order and pattern. Yet, the way in which I approach each one in terms of process, intent, materials, and ultimately product, greatly differs.

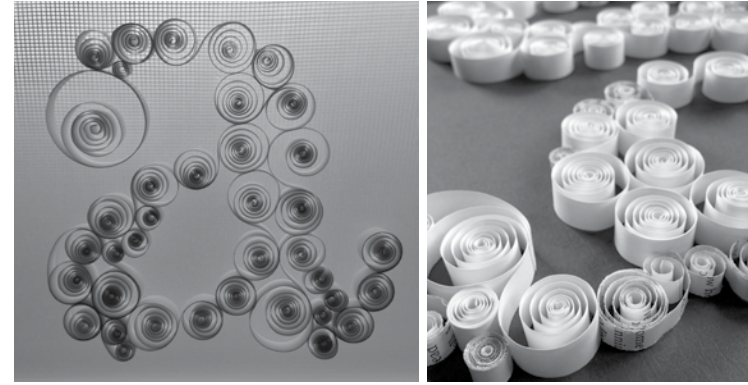
### \* *Trust, Gratitude, Discovery, Optimism & Pattern*

*During my first semester at VCFA I was prompted to use graphic design as a medium to express my personal values. Since then, I've been reflecting on what those values could be. Surprisingly difficult, I now understand it is a life-long inquiry and an ongoing process of self-evaluation. Being aware of what I value, and why, creates a genuine lens through which I can view my work. It provides a guiding light to developing my own voice as an artist and designer, and it serves as a constant reminder of who I am and who I am becoming.*



art | abrt

*The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power*<sup>28</sup>



COILED PAPER STRIP ALPHABET | STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, 2016

design | dib-zabyn

*Purpose or planning that exists behind an action, fact, or object.*<sup>29</sup>

My graphic design practice, on the other hand, is a practice entrenched in awareness of both social repercussions and physical processes. Referencing *August Meditations*, one could say it's a temporal, not a spatial, practice. As I practice design, physical space becomes a tool with which I arrange and organize visual elements, whether analog or digital, in order to create a sort of spatial practice for the reader. Rather than navigating through physical space, however, the reader navigates through content. Parameters for each project are usually determined by a 'client' that assesses the quality of the work in relation to their intended vision and goals for the project. My style and approach to design, even within distinctly different client parameters, for years has been the product of an education that was both explicit in its teachings and precise in its processes. This eventually became what is now a practice that is very calculated and tied to social context. The product of my work consistently reflects my preferred method of spatial practice within lived space: that is, amidst order, simplicity and harmony. (Or is my spatial practice now informed by my design habits?)

Beyond process and product, my design practice is also entrenched in a much more complex system of value. For over ten years graphic design has been the source of my livelihood. I have worked for world-renowned design firms and small marketing agencies, I have owned a small design boutique and have most recently become an avid design educator and advocate. The way in which my work as a designer is socially valued, however, extends beyond monetary compensation. It is a source of validation and, more importantly, of my own self confidence. Design is what I have identified with professionally for many years. It's closely tied to the core of my identity.

## ART VS DESIGN

'Art,' for me, presents an opportunity to play and experiment with physical materials, mostly uninhibited. Consciously disregarding an overt need for content or deep meaning, and with a minimized awareness of process (or even experience), my approach to 'art' bears a visual similarity to my order in consciousness. Space in this context becomes a guide to assessing composition and harmony. Often the visual product of my 'art' endeavors ends up being filled with multiplicity and pattern: the result of close observation and admiration of the natural spaces and landscapes around me. In other words, when I aim to create art, I immerse myself in my mental space and produce, piece by piece, work that visually depicts the peaceful feeling of being in that space; nothing more, nothing less. And when finished, I enjoy giving the work away to someone who I appreciate. It's a way I share myself and my experience with others.

*"The aim of art is to create space—space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration, space in which the subjects of painting can live."*  
— Frank Stella, Visual Artist

28. "Art - Definition of Art in English | Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries | English, Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/art.

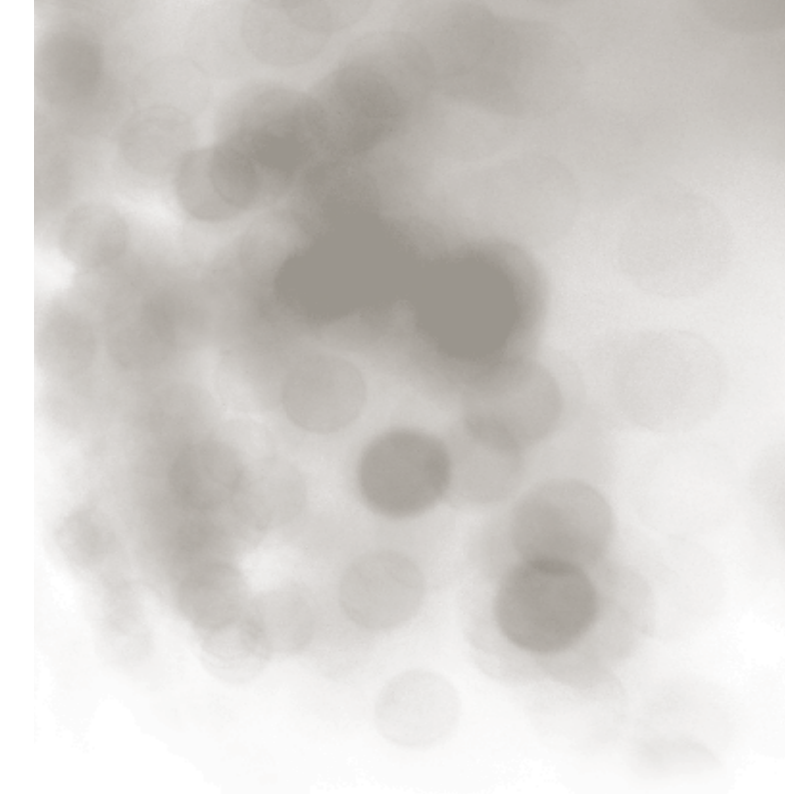
29. "Design - Definition of Design in English | Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries | English, Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/design.

This leads me to my third epiphany: one which brings me back to my original inquiry. For many years I have identified as a graphic designer. This self-identification has been an important guidepost in the journey of my ‘becoming.’ Today, however, I realize that I have been mistaken. **I am not a graphic designer. I am also not an artist.** My creative energy and artistic impulses are rooted somewhere within the vast and nebulous space that lies between these titles. Both art & design are practices that can lead me to a state of optimal experience. I love designing multi-page documents just as much as I enjoy cutting paper, folding it, gluing it, and then mindlessly repeating the process. I have always been a creative maker, but I now see that strictly identifying with only one side of the spectrum has limited my ability to grow as a person. At this point in time, I believe neglecting my art practice in favor of my design practice has actually led me to see the world, and navigate through it, with a limited perspective.

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## ART OR DESIGN

FOR ME, ART IS A **PRACTICE** THAT PROVIDES ME WITH a sense of discovery and freedom. Conversely, design is a practice that provides me with the tools I need to control the expression of my experience. **Art rises out of my mental space and produces work that reflects that space. Design rises out of my lived spaces and produces work that reflects my spatial practice.** Art is fluid and unpredictable. Design is fixed, controlled, and rigid. *Art seeks beauty. Design seeks perfection.* Art is a means for me to explore and relish in **abstraction**. Design is a practice rooted in my own version of **realism** where meaning intersects with experience. Both reflect my personal **core values** and the sum of my life’s experiences.



UNFOCUSED RAIN DROPS ON GLASS | SOUTH CAROLINA, 2013

My aesthetic tendencies within both practices are undoubtedly informed by my spatial practice and its accompanying representational qualities (created within the confines of my consciousness). The way in which I navigate through and interact with space shapes my beliefs, my values, my goals, and my creative processes. As Worringer postulated, I am now convinced that **space, as an artistic element and a tool to understand life experience, is both the reflection and the catalyst of my own aesthetic impulses**; and as I utilize that space, I am able to find my true self... somewhere in between.

*"We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skin."*

— Michel Foucault, French Philosopher

'TIGHT SPACES' SLOTTED CANYON | STAIRCASE ESCALANTE, UTAH, 2017

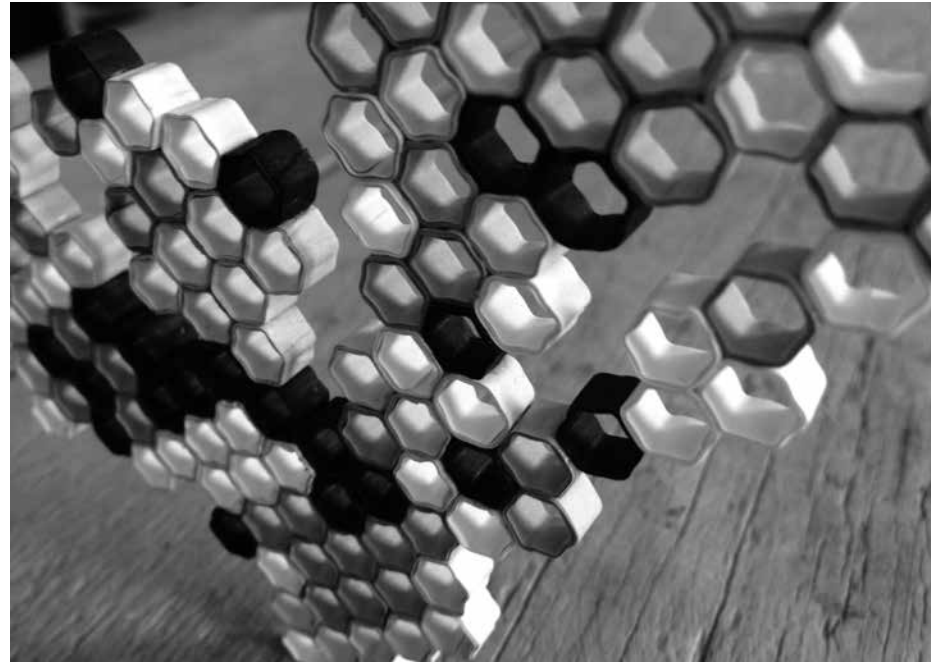
PART IV // BECOMING    **S P A C E**

40° 26' 40.5276" N >

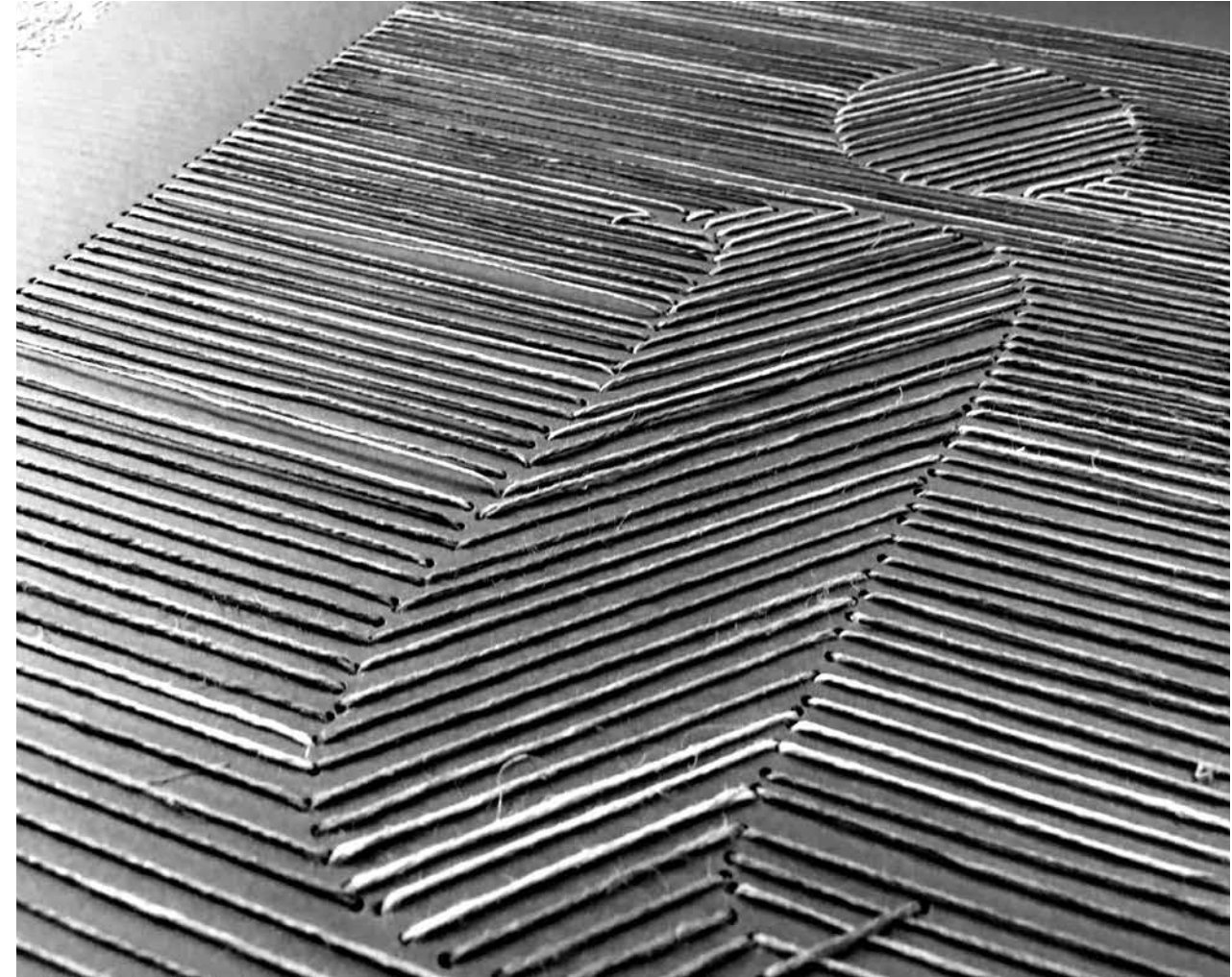
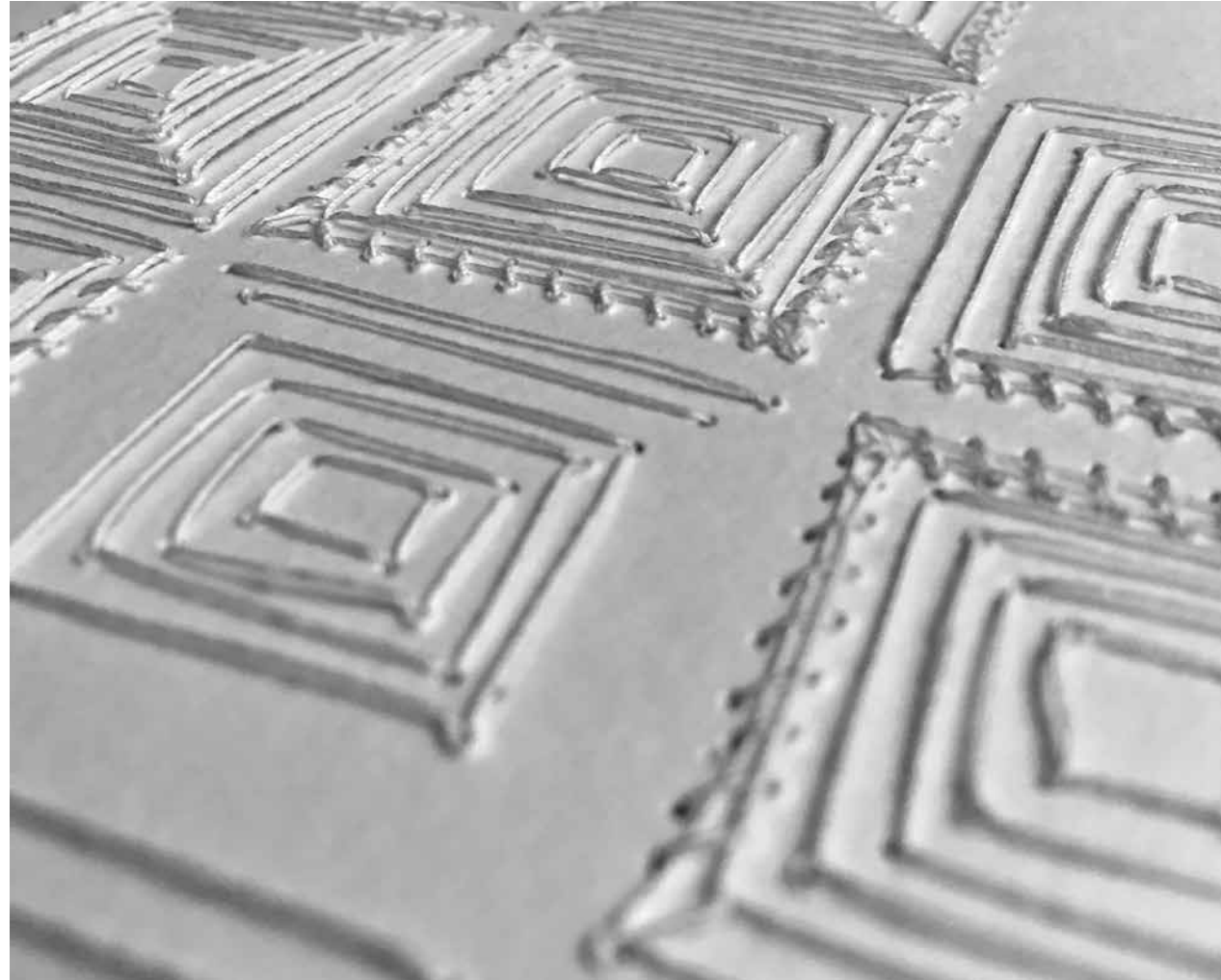
106° 48' 27.6012" W >

*"Love is space & time measured by the heart,"*  
— Marcel Proust



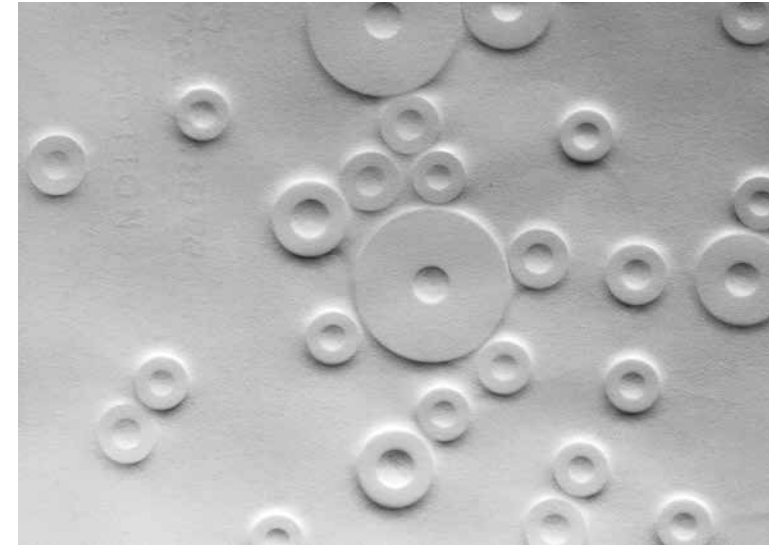
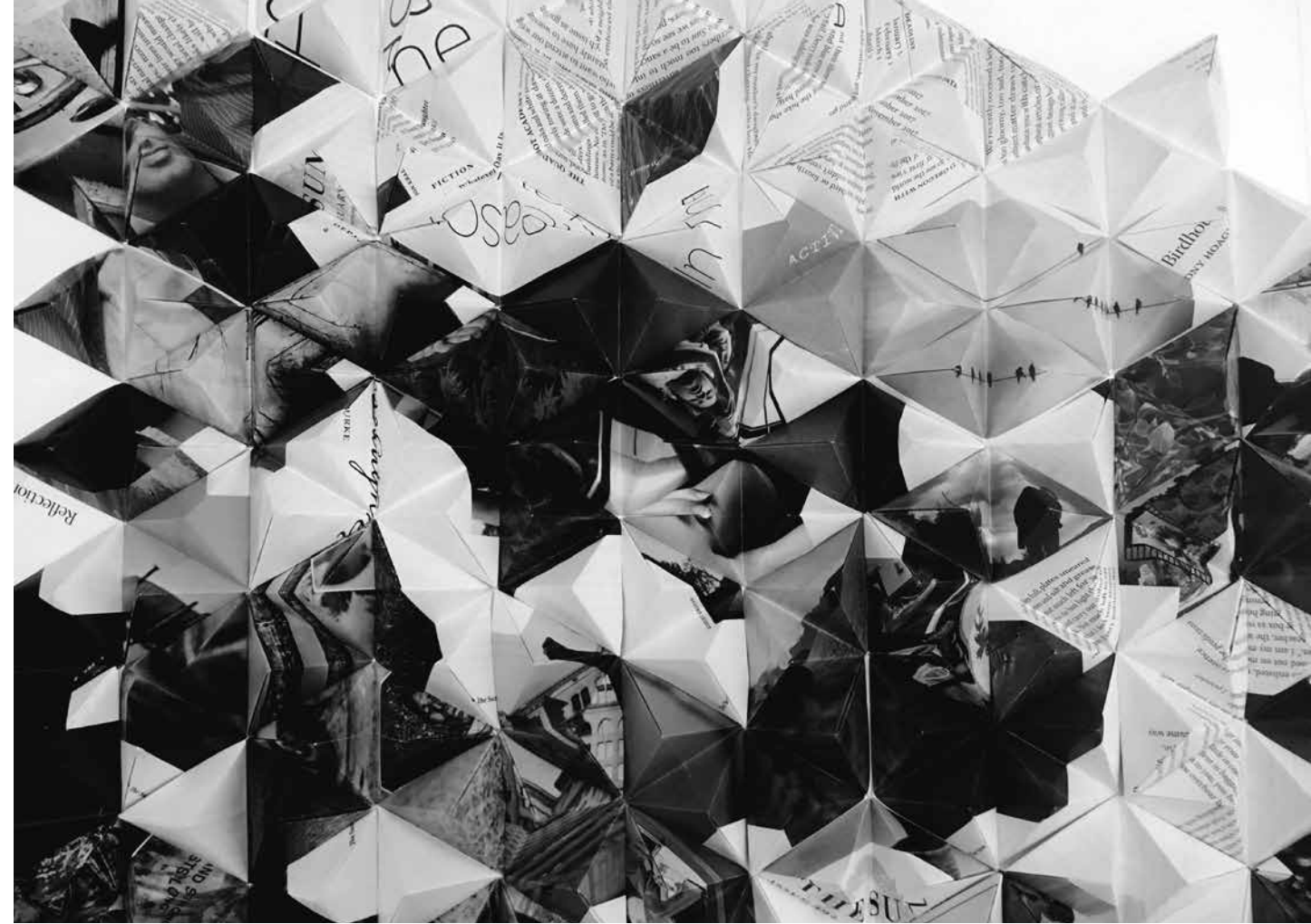


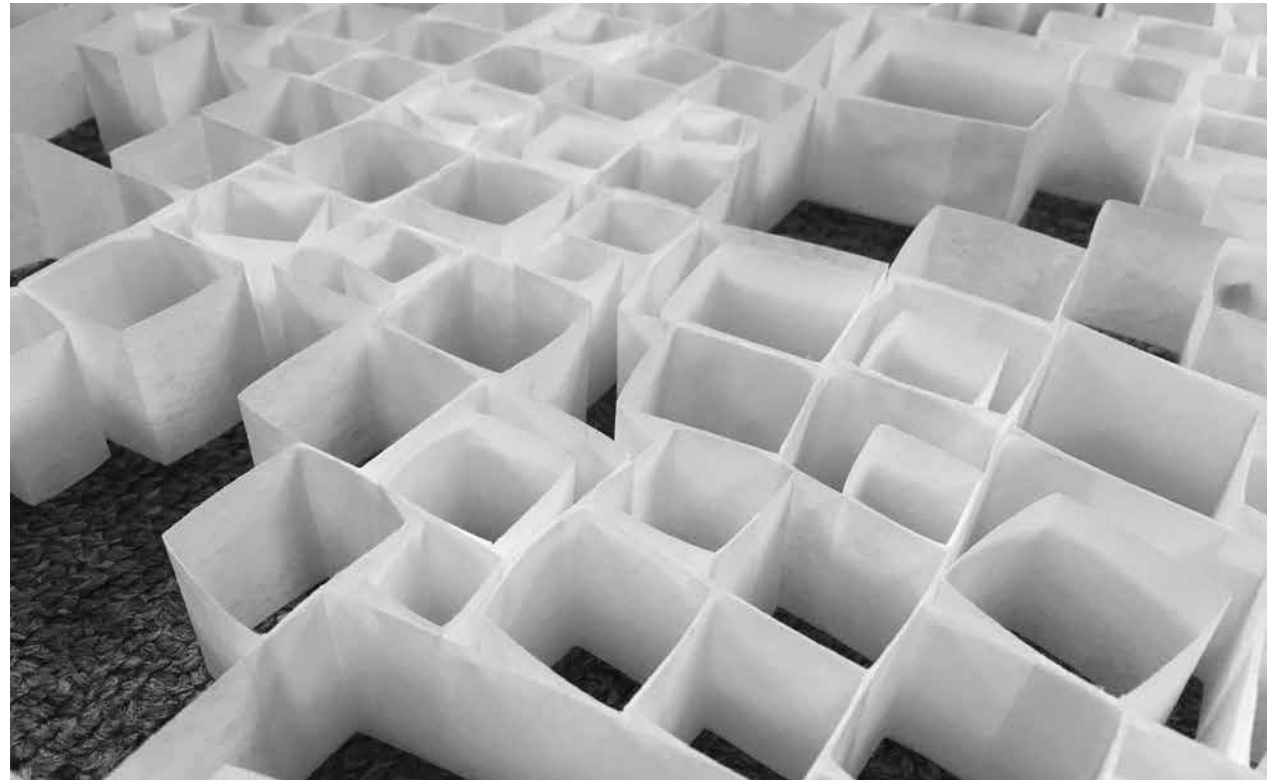













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## CONCLUSION

ONE OF MY MAIN **GOALS** FOR THIS PROJECT, aside from exploring my own ‘becoming,’ was to consider whether artists, or more specifically designers, could benefit from the principles of spatial theory. Having considered only a few of these theories, I believe there is, in fact, much of value. All of us navigate through multiple versions of space as human beings. Yet, as designers, we not only navigate through it but play an important social role in how it is framed, how it is used, how it is imagined, how it is understood, and especially how it is valued. In fact, our job is explicitly to impart meaning to others through message and visual narrative. Understanding the many ways in which we navigate through and experience the spaces we create is invaluable. Additionally, grasping those aspects of our own experience which inform our artistic tendencies can provide us with the insight needed to become more mindful makers and be a more positive contribution to society.

*“Each one of us has our own evolution of life,  
and each one of us goes through different tests  
which are unique and challenging.  
But certain things are common.”*

*And we do learn things from each other’s experience.  
On a spiritual journey, we all have the same destination.”*

— A. R. Rabman

Having immersed myself in the development of this project, there are a few specific questions that I believe designers could benefit from pondering. All of these reference, in some way, the principles of spatial theory:

ONE: **IDENTITY** // Are you an artist or are you a designer, or perhaps to you the difference does not exist or matter? TWO: **CONSCIOUSNESS** // Is your practice of art and/or design a spatial or a temporal practice? THREE: **CATALYST** // Can you identify what space (mental, physical or lived) your practice rises out of? FOUR: **REFLECTION** // Does the product of your work tend to reflect your experience within a specific form of space (mental, physical or lived) over the others? FIVE: **EXPERIENCE** // Does your practice lead you to optimal experience? If so, can you identify what specific aspect of that practice is the root of that experience?

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*There are a few aspects of space that were intentionally not included in this project. Most notably, the notion of **digital space**. This was done, in large part, because I believe that topic, and its consideration through spatial theory, could have been the source of another whole thesis. I would love to, and hope to, undertake that project some time in the future.*





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