2015

Trans•form|mogrify|mutate

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Synopsis and Metadata

The word "transformation" means different things in different contexts, but at its core, it all comes down to one thing: change. Everything changes or has the capacity to change...including the word "transformation" itself! As a linguistic unit symbolic of its inherent wordless meaning, the word itself can shift. Indeed, it has shifted and will continue to do so as time goes by due to the natural fluidity of language.

By utilizing a variety of media forms to explore this idea, I form a meta-narrative that logically shows the idea of definition being derived from contextualization.

Illustration
From One Comes Another, 2015
Digital print
3,600 px × 36,000 px (12 in × 120 in)

This piece takes its form from the transitory nature of the ten individual 12 in × 12 in squares making up the whole. Illustration is useful for showing a static moment while implying a greater movement. Everything is linked through matter and time.

Available as an additional file on PDXScholar.

Writing
Speak, 2015
Short fiction
845 words (2 pages)

This piece takes its form from the highly descriptive necessity of the written content. Writing is useful for showing a story directly to the reader's mind, letting their imagination take them to levels otherwise anticlimactic. At what point is your body no longer your body?

Available as an additional file on PDXScholar.

Video
Down the Snack Hole, 2015
Found footage
10 minutes and 34 seconds

This piece takes its form from the very modern and culturally-driven nature of video, much more so than any other form of art. Video is useful for making time explicit while having the freedom to explore. Open remixing and reimagining is necessary for culture to exist.

Available as an additional file on PDXScholar and on Vimeo.
Artist’s Statement

I have always been fascinated by transformation—the process, the context, the catalyst, the result, and the reactions. However, much like “silver” is situated within the larger concept of “gray,” so too is “transformation” situated within the larger concept of “change.” Silver specifies the range of gray being used, and transformation specifies the application of change. “Change” on its own has a fairly short definition: “to become different, to make (someone or something) different, to become something else.”¹ That’s it, and that’s how it should be. As a broad umbrella term of sorts, “change” should not be more specific than that, as that is the job of words like “alter,” “mutate,” “evolve,” and the focus of my project, “transformation.”

Specifically, “transformation” is defined as, “a complete or major change in someone’s or something’s appearance, form, etc.”² While still being broad, this narrows the idea down just enough for me to reasonably work with. Transformation as a concept is extremely malleable and is both applicable to and native to just about any context one can picture or point to. Jumping out to a meta-context, the word “transformation” itself has just as much capacity to change as any context it can be found in or placed in. As a linguistic unit symbolic of its inherent wordless meaning, the word itself can shift. Indeed, it has shifted and will continue to do so as time goes by due to the natural fluidity of language.³

My project, titled “Trans•form|mogrify|mutate,” consists of three separate pieces of art that stand on their own merits but combine to form this metanarrative of contextualization. Each piece has a twofold title: taken literally, they describe the

1 “Change.”
2 “Transformation.”
3 Rye, “Futurese.”
content of each piece; taken broadly, they describe the nature of the form of each piece. Together, both meanings of all three titles combine to convey a complex connection between what something portrays and what something is.

The first piece, an illustration, is titled “From One Comes Another.” Literally, this refers to the imagery, showing each section intertwined and part of the whole that makes up our universe and the life within it. Broadly, this refers to the construction of the piece: ten 1-foot squares drawn with transitions between them, combining to create the full 1-foot-by-12-foot print that, if continued back up to the top, loops perfectly to create a seamless circle. The length echoes the strand of DNA, visually the longest portion of the image. The colors are flat, allowing the shapes to more easily combine with one another while still retaining their unique identities. Contextually, I used this piece to explore natural, inevitable, and subtle transformations. Natural transformations tend towards the inevitable, slow processes of change that happen as a result of time affecting the physical world. Inevitable transformations are part of what makes up natural transformations, but individually tend towards a grander scale. Subtle transformations tend towards the small, the relatively insignificant, and the invisibly vital things that make up our world.

The second piece, a short fiction, is titled “Speak.” Literally, this refers to the story in which the main character's larynx is replaced through a seemingly-magical, mysterious surgical procedure. Broadly, this refers to the phenomenon that happens in the mind when details are implicit rather than explicit, allowing the mind to create a far more intriguing scenario than one spelled out for the viewer. The layout is equally as important as the story itself, meaning that the words themselves cannot simply be
displayed as plain text: the precise way that the document looks is essential to the piece. Contextually, I used this piece to explore procedural, bodily, and artificial transformations. Procedural transformations tend towards the logical, step-driven processes that are meant for repetition by future parties. Bodily transformations tend towards the aforementioned natural transformations, but specified for the individual self, no matter the species or situation of the self. Artificial transformations tend to be regarded as a diametric opposite to natural transformations and as such tend towards the spontaneous, fast processes that happen as a result of applied learning and practice.

The third piece, a video, is titled “Down the Snack Hole.” Literally, this refers to the two clips of found footage: snack bar advertisements within 1960s drive-in intermission footage and the 1915 version of Alice in Wonderland. Broadly, this refers to the layering process, involving selective color screening to allow the Wonderland footage to peek through the drive-in footage. Additionally, there is an audio track: piano tracks from the last ten years by a single composer created to invoke classic silent film orchestral accompaniment. Combined, this layers time as well as space: 1915, the 1960s, and the 2000s through now. Contextually, I used this piece to explore cultural, data, and technical transformations. Cultural transformations tend towards anything that has to do with content over form, such as jokes or shared history or current trends. Data transformations tend towards the manipulation of records, whether analog or digital. Technical transformations tend towards anything that has to do with form over content, such as a specific technique or self-adherence to a way of making art.
As a whole, all three pieces combine to form an open-ended story of time and space, or rather spacetime as a unified concept. In a truly infinite universe, infinite possibilities are all possible and real. This means that, for example, another me is sitting at a desk identical to the one I'm using right now, but her left cheek has a mole on it. All permutations, from the minuscule to the radical are in an infinite universe. Of course, we have no proof that our universe is infinite beyond the boundaries of the observable (yet still unbearably vast) universe. In this, our finite portion of the universe, change happens to incite the infinite. When something changes, it becomes different. It shifts. It turns into something that it was not. Again, that change can be so minuscule as to be only detectable on an atomic level or so radical as to push the limits of what a continued existence really means. Aging itself, as a matter of fact, pushes the limits of continued existence. A 90-year-old will bear no resemblance to their 1-year-old self, nor will they have any of the same thought patterns, nor will they even be made of the same atoms. This means that one could argue the person in question will have transformed so completely as to be another entity entirely, save for their continued existence being the only thing linking the two together in spacetime.4

Upon completion, I was satisfied at the exploration these pieces allowed me to do. I plan on creating more contextualizations in my own time, in additional sets of three to match this initial set. Perhaps the next set will be more pieces in the physical realm, to work more with form in contrast to the digital (and by extension formless) nature of this first set. I am confident that each piece will bring me a greater understanding of the manifestation possibilities of the word “transformation” as well as more insight on what it means to explore the greater concept of change.

4 Misnomers.
References


http://www.xibalba.demon.co.uk/jbr/futurese.html.