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Equation of infinity

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Equation of Infinity
A Master of Fine Arts Thesis
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Equation of Infinity
A MFA Thesis

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for my parents
Equation of Infinity

Ihsuan Lin
I.
Introduction

My two years of study at RIT has been a process of development in which art-making and personal realization were inextricably linked. Through my art-making I have explored my inner-self, which is composed with my memories of fears and joys. And in return these memories provided an inspirational resource for my artmaking.

Louis Bourgeois said, “Art is a privilege, a blessing, a relief.” I agree with that. But I believe artmaking not only releases, it also gives life. The best I hope to accomplish is a work that stands on its own without the traces of my craft and sweat. I truly believe an artwork should speak for itself. As the artist, I cannot provide an explanation of all that my work might mean. Rather I can provide a documentary of the process of giving birth to it, the process of conceiving it, nurturing it, and then departing from it.

This thesis is written in chronological order. It is a documentation of my artistic development that includes my personal background, different phases of my works and my final thesis work.

During the last two years, I have kept a record of my artmaking process in my
journal. By displaying the process of conceiving my ideas accompanied by the record from my journal, this thesis serves not only as a documentation of the evolution of my imagery, but also serves as an examination of my ideas. Through this documentation, I hope my readers will gain an insight into the relation between my personal realization and my artmaking.
II. Background

If I can recall the earliest influence on my work, it comes from growing up with my grandmother. As the only girl of busy working parents, I was raised by my paternal grandmother.

My grandmother always believed her life was a tragedy. In her early thirties, she was widowed with many children to raise. In a traditional farmer’s society, a woman has no choice but to swallow all the bitterness in her life. She had successfully raised her children alone, but was always sad about her life. Despite her fierce determination to survive all her misfortunes, her belief in her fate of living a doomed life full of suffering made her sigh and cry very often. I remember people said that my face resemble hers. For me it was like saying that we share the same destiny, because in my culture we believe our fate is written on our faces.

In a lot of my works I search for the imaginative space in our mind that we build with our fear. It’s usually a suspended space. Having the same fate as my grandmother’s was the biggest fear in my childhood and hang over everything I did. My search for those sus-
pered spaces is, to a certain degree, an intention to find those fears. Instead of dispelling my fear, my purpose is to keep it alive. What fascinates me is to capture a certain state of mind, like a biologist captures a species, names it or identifies it, and places it in display. Since fear does not have any physical dimension, I have to recreate the experience with different materials, which will then transform themselves into a spiritual experience.

I started on a totally different route before making art. In the early stage of my life, I did what I was told to, studied hard and tried to enter the best college. Within the traditional Taiwanese family, art was not a career choice that my parents would have encouraged me to take. The experience of being forced to do the same and act the same as every other child in school made me very unhappy. This probably is the other reason I always try to capture the suspended situation. I didn’t know that I could or should make the choice myself since everyone followed the same route: study hard to get a degree from a good university.
In accordance to that dictum, I obtained a Philosophy degree from National Taiwan University, and went on for a short term study in The University of Heidelberg, Germany. The decisive moment in my life came when I went to Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe (HfG) in Germany, an art school with a strong emphasis on video and digital art. The influence of artists such as Thomas Struth, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, who taught there at that time, was very important to my later decision to become an artist. As a Graphic Design student in HfG, I attended their classes in the Media Art Department frequently. Through the regular discussion in Struth’s and Lafontaine’s classes, I formulated my concept in art-making. The approaches to manifesting one’s initial world through multi-media combination have interested me ever since.

On the other hand, perhaps the most important influences came from my peers at that time. Through students I knew in the art class I had the chance to join them in their creative artmaking.

1. In Germany, the system of higher education include different institute depending on the subject. “Hochschule” is a university for one special subject or the subjects in a same area, such as Art, Engineering, etc.
process. In an environment where everyone is enthusiastic about pursuing media art, merely talking to my friends about their ideas no longer satisfied me. I wanted to make art myself. The ideas in my mind began to be a burden and I had to let them out.

Coming to RIT was the beginning of my real pursuit to make art. Study in Germany prepared me both in terms of the techniques and the concepts. Here I accomplished some ideas that were first conceived during my study in Germany, which laid the foundation for my thesis work.
When I started taking photographs, the urban landscape was my primary subject. During that period, Edward Hopper's paintings were a great influence, and I am still deeply overwhelmed by his works. The psychological effect he delivered in his painting through the depiction of strong light and shadow became an artistic role model in my early stage of taking pictures.

I felt personally deeply related to the void and loneliness in Hopper's paintings. This feeling has to do with my experience of living as a foreigner for many years. Living abroad, I encountered the western culture and its landscape, which is very different from where I came from. The comparison between a foreign external environment and my inner-self, the outside and the inside, was a major issue in my life. Without being surrounded by a family that provides a feeling of security, being an alien in many different environments and moving constantly to search for my real goal for life, what I had inside has became very important in keeping myself strong enough to carry on.

On the other hand, living alone in a for-
eign country also provided the opportunity to look at myself with my own eyes.

"The beginning of the end of all literacy activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is in me. All things being grasped related, recreated, loaded, and reconstructed in a personal form, in an original manner."

-- Goethe

Edward Hopper carried this quotation from Goethe around in his wallet. Instead of making art motivated by what the critics of his time recognized as the "the American Scene", he cited Goethe’s quotation about literary activity to explain his fundamental artistic endeavor. Hopper painted realistic objects to express the inner state of his mind. For him, art was "the outward expression of an inner life in the artist."\(^2\)

The early stage of my life abroad was a time of observing both the world surrounding me and in me. I used the camera as a tool to capture the outside world that related to my inner feeling. Taking pictures became a way of recording my life, expressing my feeling

\(^2\) From Edward Hopper’s “Statement by Four Artist,” Reality, 1, Spring 1953.
and finding my identity. The motion of pressing the shutter was an instant release of my inner state of mind. But I was not actively expressing myself. At that period of my life, I was an observer, an outsider.

After my arrival in Rochester, a transition began to take place. At the beginning I was using the camera to make realistic paintings, but gradually I turned the camera toward my private space. My pictures became more abstract. I took pictures of my shadow, the bright sunlight, and the light-flooded floor. Instead of recording the outside world, the search for the abstract pattern began to intrigue me.

I wanted to capture images instantly without the complicated technical procedure such as setting up the camera or measuring the light. A “Spice Girl” Polaroid camera from a K-mart discount store, which has only a button for the shutter, was my solution. Each series of pictures always started with one single picture. Depending on what I saw in the initial image, I would take more pictures and slowly constructing a whole. Instead of making a single per-
fect shot, I was building a picture map of my own. It was a process of mapping out my sensitivity toward the immediate surroundings and linking the sequence together with a certain narrative.

There is a difference between the conventional way we grid the map and the way each individual grids his own. I grid my own map to preserve the memory when the light hits my floor, or the apples lying on the corner of my table.

How can the process of picture-making be totally controllable? The picture comes out, then you find a new piece of yourself. The great thing is not I am achieving what I planned in advance, but the excitement of the unknown and unexplored. It's such a great excitement to set up a way of working and to see how far you can go. (11/11/98)

These sequences of images led me to video, the next step in building an individual artistic vision. Through the sound and the shift between the physical
and psychological environments in video, I tried to create a more complete experience about my sensitivity.

The visual elements from my first video titled *Shadow* are partially based on the images from the Polaroid series while the lyrics were about my dreams. I dream a lot. Sometimes I find the dreams mix with the reality and gain power as in combination they become even more real than the reality. *Shadow* reflects this melding of my dreams with reality.

The video starts with the reality of a female hand braiding hair, and evolves into a realm of illusions, composed by images of shadows, cutting fingers that overlaid each other and correspond to the lyrics. It was a very ambiguous piece, and as I look at it today, I think it marks the point at which I turned to look at myself rather than at the outside world.

For many years I was an outsider who always stood aside and observed. The demand of holding a strong concept in this program forced me to contemplate what I have and who I am. It sped up
the process of understanding my inner world. Instead of observing and listening, I had to communicate with a language that I could only learn by looking into my mind. The experience I built upon as a loner in a foreign world, the void, fear and dark corners in my inside world, gradually surfaced in both my pictures and the video piece.

The revelation of my sensibility in Shadow was also a learning process of finding my own artistic language. I found my inner-world a place awaiting exploration. Shadow was a very personal work, a specific look at myself before I took the next step to convey something further. I knew if I wanted to broaden my individual vision, I had to expand the work beyond a record of my personal history.

The work that followed the Shadow video was an installation in which I created an environment. Two projection screens were placed facing each other about 15 feet apart. On one screen was the slide projection of a struggling ant. On the other were female hands knitting an indistinguishable white garment. In the background was my voice count-
Putting an ant into a slide mount to magnify its movements was an expansion of my earlier work made while studying in Germany. It was an idea that I had for years but it hadn’t come to the surface before. The piece concerns a child’s need to test the limit of fear by watching something frightful which appears bigger than life. As a child, I often put little insects in glass bottles and observed them. I could watch those insects for hours and never tiring of the activity in the small world I had created. Looking at the projected shadow of the ant struggling inside the slide mount was like looking at the bottle with insects from my childhood. The difference is, this time the fears were enlarged bigger than life.

Few years ago I was introduced to the work of Christian Boltanski. I found his use of shadows interesting in the way it functions on the psychological level. Different from looking directly at an object, looking at its projection increases the surreal quality while the physical realness were reduced. But instead of a
still projection like Boltanski’s work, *The Angle of Accord*, I wanted to create an act like a shadow theater. After some drawings and experiments, I built a special slide mount with two pieces of thin glass which left enough space inside for the ants to freely move around. As the ants would try to find an exit their struggle was projected onto the wall. The installation used the actual projection of the ant; the live performance greatly increased the tension in the audience. The giant moving shadow of the ant was both physically surreal and psychologically overwhelming.

In contrast to the frenetic search of the ant for freedom was the imageries of me knitting and counting numbers in Chinese, which was projected on the opposite wall. The purpose of counting in Chinese was that since majority of the viewers wouldn’t understand it, the rhythm of the sound took over the meaning of the words.

A brief encounter with a Scottish woman that I had written in my journal explains the motivation of making the knitting video:

*There is a woman I will never forget. I saw*
her for only a very short period of time, but I already know the story of her life. She got on the coach between Loch Ness and Aberdeen. Me and my friend, we didn't know the coach stop everywhere. All we knew is that this route went along the northeast Scottish coast and we both thought it would be a good way to see some beautiful sea. The coach was small and shaking all the time. Though the coast was beautiful, we started to feel impatient after it stopped every twenty minutes in a village. Then this woman got on to the coach in one of those small village in seaside. She has long braided hair. I call her a woman but she might be only twenty or eighteen. She was young. Two or three kids followed her. In her arms, she had a baby. It was the baby that caused my attention. It was a very big baby. The healthy look of the baby and the tiresome face of the woman made a strong contrast. She arranged the kids to seat, and all the time she carried that baby.

You see those dark gray village along the seaside and this young woman with a big baby in her arms, you read the whole story. In some way I find her beautiful because of her youth. But I knew her beauty was dying, or it's never an issue in her life. After two or three stops she got off the coach and stood
under the midday sun. It's bloody hot out there, she had that big baby in her arms, and she looked even younger under the sun.

I can't explain why I remember her so clearly. She was probably born there in that small village along the seaside, and she will grow old and die there. And at that moment when I finish editing the sound for the knitting video I thought about her, I want to go back to that moment and take a picture of her. The endless knitting, repeating and repeating, is in certain degree related to my seeing her on that coach. The story of women are mostly so, I mean, women who are locked up in a small world. Their life are quiet and they live like their mother or grandmother did. In a certain way, I find her beautiful because it's beautiful to stay in a dream over and over, sometime. (2/14/99)
Most events happen in front of our eyes without commanding our attention. Sometimes the story beneath the surface can only be comprehended after it is displayed under a magnifying glass. My sympathy toward the Scottish woman, the boredom I felt in life, or other memories might be hidden within this piece. My memories surface from time to time during the conception of a work or are revealed to me after a work is done. However, it is not specific events such as seeing a beautiful tree or a special person that I want to present, it is the emotional aspect of experience which I work to reveal. This emotional experience can only be experienced by the others when the personal aesthetics are transparent.

"The big problem in art is being able to tell the story of your own village, while at the same time having your village become everyone's village. I want to be faceless. I hold a mirror to my face so that those who look at me see themselves and therefore I disappear."

-- Christian Boltanski

Like writing a sentence or a story, my artmaking is a form of communication. There are words we can choose to tell a
story, but we do not create words, we create stories. Neither the ants installation nor the knitting video were produced from an aesthetic point of view, they were shown together because they melted into one environment and created tension between each other. They are different words in one sentence.

During the presentation of this piece, I was asked what the ant represents. I didn’t have an answer, since for me it was the sentence that matters, not the single words.

How do we see an ant? Do we see it as a symbol of hard working, as a symbol of greediness, or, in my attempt, as part of an emotional tension? Everything has different faces depending on the angle from which it is viewed.

"How could you see a car run forever? Like us, they have a life span. They are human when they faint and then die."  
-- Rebecca Horn

For the work I produced during the third quarter, I again looked within for a story that must be told. As a child I always suspected there were people liv-
ing inside the radio and searched for them all the time. I couldn’t believe in what the adult said that the radio is lifeless and only a machine. When my parents change the old big stereo into a modern and smaller one, I imagined those little people work inside our old radio dying in the garbage place. In my apartment in Rochester, there were constantly a vibration noise that sounded organic. Even though I knew that the noise came from the refrigerator, my neighbor’s air conditioner, and from all the electronics running in my apartment, it alone still gave me the feeling of something secretly growing and multiplying. Out of the frustration of not being able to nail down the source of the noise that invaded my environment all the time, I made a drawing of what I envisioned was growing somewhere in a corner of my home. Then using the drawing as my guide, I created an installation.

Formed from a tangles of very thin wire in which a number of small whirring motors were enmeshed, the piece hung in a corner up against the ceiling of a white room. Smaller nests, which were
off shoots of the larger one, were placed as evidence of an infestation. Inside the nest, the small motors vibrated against each other.

When people entered the room, they heard the noise of the vibrating motors and a search would reveal where the noise was coming from. By looking at the object, it was very difficult to comprehend what it was. It had an organic form composed from mechanic elements, which generated a subtle mechanic sound that was also organic. The moment of the realization at the same time was the moment of confusion. Was the motor a lifeless cold object? Or was it a living organic being?

Much effort went into making it seem alive. Equally technically challenging was making the outcome, creating lifeless objects which seemed alive, look effortless.

During the Walkthrough review I was surprised by the reaction of many viewers. A lot of people found the installation looked like a female private part. This reaction made me contemplate: was I aware of that appearance in rela-
tion to my own sexuality? My answer is no. I conceive my work as a person who have a certain vision. My sexuality definitely has to do with my vision like anyone does with their own. But I didn’t intend to make a work about gender and hadn’t realized the other connection until someone pointed it out. However, if the work was exactly like my vision, it might not have as much power. I worked from a drawing that was my blueprint during the construction, but during the process of making it, it become part of my vision and part of its own blueprint. I still think about this installation from time to time and look at it like looking at those little insects in the bottle from my childhood.

Concurrent with making this object, I was reading the works about Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hess and Rebecca Horn. In Bourgeois and Hess’s works and in the materials they use, there is constant reference to female sexuality. I might have taken those influences unconsciously into my work. However, as an inspiration, the influence from Rebecca Horn is strongest. In her works I see the revelation of a unique
personal vision manifesting actions taking place in her mind. This encouraged me to work with my own vision. During the time I lived with my grandmother as if I were the only child and the years of living alone as a foreigner, I fed my hunger to communication with imagination. The images from my imagination became the initial resource of my art, and the process of conceiving my work has been a process of recreating both my observation toward my environment and the actions taken place in my mind in solitude.

Later I read Rebecca Horn’s story about staying in a sanatorium for more than a year. She mentioned the importance of being isolated in the process of embodying her later creativity, “When you are very isolated or alone, you have this tremendous longing of communication.”

This longing of communication I read about in her works is also part of me since my childhood.

There are external motivations such as a movie, a small photograph in the newspaper, or even my dreams (obvious in the video Shadow) that later surface in

3. From The Bastille Interviews I, Rebecca Horn with Germano Celant, Paris, 1993
my work. As I stated in the introduction, my personal realization and art-making are inextricably linked. The influences from mixed sources are digested by my mind and in that they become part of myself and, inevitably, become part of my work.

The work up to the end of my first year in RIT were a series of experiments. They were not thoroughly conceived or completed works made for formal presentation. Rather, they were experiments. Through those experiments I learned to transform the information from my mind into a physical experience. Every artwork is made from a psychological experience, which remains a purely physical experience or leads to a new psychological or spiritual event. For me, the purpose of my experiments of different materials was to create new psychological or spiritual territories.
IV. Transition

I proposed to expand the motor installation as my thesis and emphasized my concept about the motor as a symbol of the mechanism that have taken over the control of our daily life. The first idea was to capture the feeling about the mechanism taking over control of our daily life. I made some drawings, in which the motor was planted into a big opened mouth. However, I didn’t intend to build an object according to my drawing as I did with my earlier installation. For me, the motor is an insect; an insect that connected with the vessel of the body it lives in. With this idea in mind, I made a video of my mouth struggling with a motor inside. This footage became an important element I then started with.

The footage of a motor inside a mouth is like a character I created. It became my obligation to fit it into its own story. I never intended this to be a lonely character that can be shown alone. Rather than that, I always start with an element and then build a structure around it. In order to make the ants projection become a complete story that can be experienced by other peo-
ple. Even though the original idea was conceive few years earlier, it was stored in my mind until I found a solution to show it in my second quarter in RIT. For me, my job as an artist is to find a unique way of telling a story that can only be expressed visually, be experienced physically, and, in the end, become a psychological experience. The footage of the motor is the element I started with, and it took a while until I found the unique way to make the experience complete.

Following the footage of motors, I shot some footage of night scenes with city light from the passenger seat of a car. With that footage in hand, I started to edit them together, and it end up, after a lot of technical pursuit, a three-frame video projection. The duration of the video is about four minutes. It contains three frames of moving images; in the center is the image of the motor footage, on the both side are the same abstract night light images mirroring each other.

It was an intense period of working and learning the techniques. Following the concept I had proposed in my thesis
still from the three fame video, December, 1999

proposal, I was determined to finish my thesis as soon as possible. With this ambition in mind, I worked intensively. However, the editing of this video piece became an endless laboring for something that I could hardly accomplish. I liked the visual effect of the video piece, but there seemed to be many possibilities to edit it differently. I felt lost in the process of doing the work. I believe if I had find the right story for this character, I would have feel that I would never do this piece in any other way. Making an artistic work is a very complicated mental process; it cannot be done according to a concrete idea. What I enjoy the most in making a work is not the moment when the work is completed, but the process of conceiving something with a vision, in other words, the process of creating the story. As I struggle with this piece I realized that I lost the vision because the joy was replaced by the determination to finish the work.

Since video is a visual experience limited by its time-based nature, presentation of this piece also become a problem. As opposed to a short film or a
movie that requires people to stay for a certain amount of time to understand it, I initially wanted to create a physical experience that involved walking and interaction within a space which would not be limited by time. Even though my primary material is video, my intention was to use video as an element and create an experience that resemble viewing a painting or a sculpture. In other words, I do not see myself as a video artist; rather, I have always wanted to freely combine different media.

The first pursuit to resolve the motor video become a confrontation with my own artistic vision. After clarifying my thoughts about which direction I want to convey, I decided to start over again. Instead of making a two-dimensional, time-based work such as video, I began searching for elements in my next work, which will be a complete three-dimensional physical experience.
VI. Thesis: an exhibition of three installations

After a long period of working, the final result of my thesis evolved from the original idea. The idea had gone far beyond what I had written in my proposal to include a constructed space containing three installations. The three installations each presented an idea which led to and enhanced the understanding of the other.

Designing the space began after the plans of constructing the installations were settled. Since I didn’t choose to show my work in a conventional gallery, there was more freedom to design the entire space to accommodate three pieces of works that did not have an immediate connection to each other. Inside the exhibition space, I painted the walls black to make the limitation of the space become invisible. Unlike a painting or a video projection, a mixed media installation needs specific settings in order to distinguish itself from the environment. My obligation as an artist is to present my work the way it should be perceived without unnecessary interruptions.

What I had in mind were visual elements that would connect and accentu-
ate each piece without being noticed. In other words, certain limitation has to be set so the viewing experience is directed toward the work. Since the major part of my work were video that illuminate in the dark, I worked around this element and made them all being viewed in the dark. While the black walls make the limitation of the space invisible, it also limited the viewing experience to be built only toward the work. The visual consistency of glowing imageries from the installations became the hints directing the viewer to convey the space.

The first work in my thesis, which is installed at the entrance of the space, is a sink. It is the final version of the motor footage. Divided by a wall, the next work to be viewed is a clock that related to the third and larger installation of four video columns, *Equation of Infinity*. The clock, which is titled *Time*, was originally designed to be viewed in the normal daylight, but as I mentioned before, in order to create a visual consistency, I designed a illuminated case to light up the clock. After the change, *Time* became an important key for con-
necting the sink and the *Equation of Infinity*.

The entire viewing experience happen in the dark, which also make the very subtle audio can be heard more clearly. Began with the subtle dripping sound of the sink to invite the viewer into the space, the glow of illuminated case of the clock then drew the viewer to the
second room. Passing through the small hallway where the clock was, a subtle murmur and the glow from the monitors then attracted the viewers into the third room. The third room contained four columns, each column has monitors in the front and the back. When the visitors walk around the column, the images they just see will appear again on the other side. The two-side column enabled the viewing experience become physically involved in the movement played in the video. This setting also enabled the video to be seen from different angles in the room.

The Sink

Continuing the idea with the motor footage, I placed a small LCD monitor, on which the footage of motor inside a mouth was playing, into the drain. It is difficult for me to explain why I chose the sink. A digital image I made about the same time provides an example of how my idea evolved. I used a digital imaging process to combine many different photographs from my Polaroid picture series into one picture. In the
picture, a hand surfaces from water in a basin on a dark kitchen table. The implication of water in both pieces represents the dividing line between reality and illusion. In retrospect, what I didn’t accomplish in the digital picture was conveyed in the sink piece.

The sink installation and the digital picture both express the idea about the blurred line between what is real and what is not. Here, water is the border between the real and unreal. When we see something appear on the water’s surface, there is always the question of whether it’s a reflection or a real object. It’s an illustration of being trapped between sanity and insanity, between reality and illusion.

“In the image of an unknown body we also recognize the reflection of the “symbolic image” of our body, not the one which is real and living but the representation we have of it.”

-- Jacinto Lageira, The Image of the World in the Body of the Text

The sink is a symbolic image of the body. In the above quote of Jacinto Lageira, his subject was Gary Hill’s
video piece in which Hill tied several video cameras to his own limbs and recorded the movements. While my work is very different from Hill's, what Lageira described is not only about a single work, but rather it describes the essence of many works. We do not only recognize the symbolic image of our body from other's bodies; we also recognize it from many objects in our daily life. My third quarter work, which was viewed by many people as a reference to a female body part, is an example. The representation of the body does not need the realistic depiction of it. Building the sink was like reassembling a body. Just as the mouth is a receiving part of our body, so is the drain for the sink. Instead of a realistic depiction of a body, what I tried to convey was its concept about creating of a state of mind. It has a physical dimension, but this physical dimension is to recall our memory that does not need the support of a physical dimension. This memory is more a universal concept about the body.

A state of mind, which I tried to represent in this piece, is not something that
takes place in front of our eyes. What make us relate to it is what speak directly to our brain, and it’s what a two dimensional picture lacks: the sound. The idea to make ripples in the video came from my environment. In my kitchen sink, the water kept dripping all the time, so I recorded it’s sound and added it into the video. The ripple effect adds another layer to this object. The sound of water dripping not only creates a space of something (the water) that didn’t exist, it also indicate that something was out of control. Usually, the first reaction when we hear the water dripping is to turn the faucet tighter to stop it. With this sink, there is no way to stop the dripping because the ripple comes from something that didn’t exist. From a distance, the viewer cannot see what happen inside the drain. Only when they approached the sink and look down the drain did the mouth with motor inside appear clearly. Our brain responds to the rhythm of sound more than to information gathered by our eyes. The rhythm of water dripping complete the physical experience about the imaginary water in our
brain. It also corresponded the silent rhythm of the next piece, *Time*.

**A clock of eternal present and Equation of Infinity**

“For most of it’s early avatar, video was a medium that privileged time based experience with real time normally replacing the reality of actual space.”

-- Gary Hill

The concept about being trapped in a space and time started with my experiment with the knitting and ant projection. Any person who works with video will sooner or later encounter the issues about its time-based nature. This can be a privilege, but can also be a limitation. Based on my interest in breaking this limitation, I started making video of still running images. Initially, it was technically challenging. After I overcame the techniques, the project grew into the four-column video installation, *Equation of Infinity*.

*Time* was a spontaneous idea happened during the editing for *Equation of Infinity*. while it could be taken as a
footnote for the whole exhibition, it is an individual piece representing the notion of an eternal present. Even though the second hand keeps moving on this clock, the time always stays the same. In the reign of emotion, or even obsession, time does not run conventionally. Instead of indicating the conventional time form, this piece indicates how time being sensed in a certain state of mind. Each single movement of the second hand, like each single dripping sound of the water, repeat the same motion, in a more subtle way.

In *Equation of Infinity* I extended a single moment of present into a infinitely revolving cycle. The repeating motion of each video can be the declaration of our possession of the present; or it can be an obsession with it. Those images are all daily banal occurrences in life. The water glass, the scissors, black letter on white paper, and a thin thread were chosen because their simplicities are not symbolic of any emotion except
the single motion of repeating present. Contrary to the motion of pouring water into a glass, which is gaining something and means a plus, the motion of pulling thread is losing something, it implies a minus. The compensation between the plus and minus is repeated the other two video. While in one of the video ‘plus one’ is typed endlessly, in the other video a pair of scissors constantly cuts a fabric that has no end. By the motion of gaining and losing, those video make the whole situation even. Meanwhile, each single video depicts the same situation in a different way. They all repeat a routine like a mind repeat the same thought. The interaction of plus and minus between the four pieces echo the notion each of them individually implies to: the state of no progression.

"The form of the appearance of the will is only the present, not the past or the future; the latter do not exist except in the concept and by the linking of the consciousness, so far as it follows the principle of reason. No man has ever lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the present alone is the form of all life, and is a possession that no misfortune can
In these installations, while everything seems to run infinitely, *Time* and the *Equation of Infinity* contain a contradiction, they are not progressive. In the clock, the normal process of time passing doesn’t happen. Watching the repeating movement of this clock the viewer observes the suspension and the progression of time taking place at once. The same thing happens in *Equation of Infinity*; those things that supposed to have an end in the real world never end. Watching the video and the clock become an act of staying in the constant present while experiencing the succession of time. The notion of progression is often linked with the notion of the succession of time, but these two notions become contradiction here. Each image of the video represent a thought that is always played in the present tense, like an obsession to be hold on to, infinitely.

In my work, I did not intend to present an philosophical debate about percep-
tion and time. The original purpose was breaking the conventional limitation of the time based nature of video. I intended, in other words, to create a physical experience about the infinite. The way I found, in which the infinite can be experienced, was through the recirculation of the present.

In *The story of Adele H.*, the French director, Truffaut, tells the story of Victor Hugo’s daughter's 16-year pursuit of a British Soldier. To win the love of that soldier was the only way Adele could prove her existence; to establish her identity as an individual rather than as the daughter of the famous Victor Hugo. Her enthusiasm became an obsession and she spent the rest of her life in a mental institution. The tragic character in this movie, Adele H. represent a portion of all of us. The enthusiasm and the desperation of being loved, being validated in one’s existence, whatever it’s for, it’s an energy, and is never related to suspension. It is always related to the progressive, the growing, and the infinite. It’s a state of mind that generates itself and keeps going on and on. An obsession is a looped mind look-
ing for comfort by repeating the same route to keep moving yet never going anywhere. The constant repetition of a thought is sometimes a proof of existence. The Buddhists say that the world our eyes see is an illusion. If that is so, then what hold us to believe our eyes is our own obsession, which, stated neutrally, is our possession of the belief in what we perceive with our eyes. In a way, when we keep moving, even if it is merely repetition, we might not feel as if we are suspended in a space.

With *Equation of Infinity*, instead of making an object that stood opposite to the viewer, I created a space that was as intimate as inside a mind. The four video-columns defined a space the viewers could freely explore. This space is not a recreation of a reality; it was the reality of mind. Video represents a real object without the physical dimension a real object takes. The lack of physical dimension make the video in a dark space become weightless like a thought floating suspended in a time and a space.
The installation had two audio tracks, which brought out the sense of being inside someone’s thought. At the beginning, I didn’t plan to have the sound for the installation. This work became very distant to me. I added the sound later on; it’s me murmuring in two different languages. One audio track was in German, it’s a short paragraph from the journal of Käthe Kollwitz about her dream of being blind and the fear of losing her sight and not being able to work again.  

The other audio track is in Chinese, it’s from my diary. I wrote it several years ago about my making mistakes but refusing to give up the right of being an individual who can fail.  

The audio has the rhythm of the murmuring in our mind. It was looped and repeating the same paragraphs over and over. By reducing the volume of the sound to a level which could only been heard slightly, it became the voice we speak to ourselves. What I said in the audio has a meaning to me, and it’s related to my obsession with my work. After adding the audio I felt very com-


5. Translating from Chinese in English, I wrote: “I know that life is short. Maybe I would die tomorrow. But before my death, I will still be doing the same. I will repeat the same mistake, and it is inevitable.”
fortable staying in the room. It was like resting in an illuminate space inside myself. This is an experience of sharing the secret part that we all have in our mind but may never dare to tell. For me, it is a soothing experience.
VIII. Epilogue

"In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane."

--- Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act"

My artmaking has always been a complicated mental process of struggling toward a realization, which may end far away from the original intention. However, it's the trip from the intention to the realization that tempts me to make art. Duchamp called the difference between the intention and the realization a personal "art coefficient" that would then be redefined and weighed on the esthetic scale by external spectators. My work will receive its verdict with or without me. In this thesis writing, I examined each footprint in my path throughout my study in RIT. The purpose is not to reach any verdict for my art on the esthetic scale, but to record an important piece of personal history that will greatly involve my future artistic development.
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