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Mirror Room

Mylar on walls, tarletan mold sculptures

I knew that I wanted to make an infinity mirror room before I had decided on a research topic, so I tried to identify how I felt personally connected to the setup of infinity rooms before doing research. I decided on the topic of time after realizing that infinity rooms fed my fascination with my future and questions about time's eternity. During my research, I found that most philosophies about time dealt with time through the categorizations of past, present, and future. These philosophies questioned the hierarchy of these periods of time, leading me to wonder about how much my thoughts around the future and the past affect me in the present. Out of this question, I formed the idea of my mirror room addressing the past, present, and future simultaneously. The present and future can sometimes feel impersonal to me as periods too easily manipulated by others. However, my past experiences will always remain my very own, as it is my decision to reflect on my experiences however I want and change my ways of thinking about the past. Accordingly, my past is most personally represented in this room through the molded bells and chimes hanging throughout the piece. Bells remind me of my grandparent's home, as their vast bell collection is central to their living room in South Korea; I have many memories of shuffling up and down the bell shelf ringing the bells that were collected as traveling souvenirs. Meanwhile, the sound of wind chimes has remained a background noise tied to the home of my early childhood. I sought to represent these two versions of homes and self through the union of bells and chimes in my piece. Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms were my primary inspiration; their continuity and never-ending, ethereal qualities made me feel profoundly insignificant. Using tarleton to mold all of my sculptures has allowed the mirror room to reflect light most effectively. Initially, I had expected the mold sculpture of myself to be the central piece in my room; however, circling back to my research and personal reflection reminded me that my past seems to always loom above my head. I decided to incorporate more bells in my room for this reason, rather than having one or two. My guiding questions were: "How much does the past affect you?" "How much do you honor the person you once were?" "How can you develop from your past self and take advantage of future opportunities?" Solitude is essential to introspection, so I would like viewers to enter my room **one at a time**.

Theories About Time



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Writer's Note: This paper addresses theories about the passage of time and the existence of a past, present, or future. I will explain the variations of these theories in short summaries.

Introduction

The change and development that often occurs during one's teenage years has prompted me to assess my life thus far. In this analysis, questions about time often circulate my mind; I worry about whether or not I have made good use of my time, I become anxious thinking about time slipping through my fingers, I daydream of the time that I have crafted memories in and I try to think of ways to slow down time. While trying to address these queries, I reflect on my childhood and the foundational experiences that have shaped who I am today. At the same time, I wonder about what the future will bring and who I will be in a few years' time.

My understanding of time is that we move through life as individuals and the time that we are currently living in marks the preceding and following periods as a past and future, respectively. However, I believe that different understandings of time influence the ways that people live or view their lives. Those who do not believe in the existence of a predetermined future may be more inclined to believe in free will. Those who view the past, present, and future as ontologically equal may be more easily inclined to have broader perspective and more often see the big picture. As a child, I discarded each day with ease and rarely acknowledged the past or how it might affect my present. Today, however, I find myself thinking only about the past and trying to understand myself through the lens of my past experiences. The future has become too daunting and easily disorganized, and I often get trapped between a fear of progressing through life and time's inevitable march forwards.

When I first saw pictures of Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms, I was impressed, but did not fully understand their intensity. However, after viewing her eccentric *LOVE IS CALLING* room in person at the ICA, I was able to understand how the work was supposed to represent "infinite futures." After conducting further research, I found that her themes circle around continuity and repetition as a result of the mirror rooms; she has covered obsession, the future, and the self. I chose to focus on time because it is a prominent theme in my life at the moment.

Through my project and this paper, I hope to expand my views of time and simultaneously make peace with the fact that time is so elusive that understanding it is a feat that I should not hope to achieve. I will focus on different philosophies of time through the eyes of different cultures. The first I will focus on is Western philosophies; within that category, I will examine reductionism, platonism, presentism, and eternalism. While examining those Western philosophies, I will look into Islamic philosophies. Finally, I will look into Buddhist philosophies. Through these different philosophies, I believe I will be able to achieve understanding and debates around time.

Reductionism and Platonism

One of the primary arguments within discussions concerning time is about time's independence from events in our lives. Within this debate, two parties have formed: Reductionists and Platonists. Reductionists believe that time is not independent of events. Therefore, they perceive time as a relative quality, or a way of describing events. "If you are a relationist about space and time then you must also be a relationist about motion: all motion is motion relative to something. If you are a substantialism about space and time, you will endorse, in addition to relative motion, the notion of absolute motion..." (Emery, Markosian, and Sullivan). The philosophies of time are quite linked to metaphysics, as this view of time assumes that time is dependent on motion.

Meanwhile, Platonists are of the belief that time is a container in which events happen. According to that understanding, an “absolute time” forms in which events take place without regard to how time behaves. Thus, time is independent of motion.

Islamic Views of Time

Philosophers of the Islamic Golden Age were quite influenced by Ancient Greece’s Reductionism and Platonism. In particular, Platonism’s concept of “absolute time” that is untouchable by human motion appealed to the concept of God’s omnipotence. In the Quran, the word for “time” does not appear once, but there are descriptions of God’s ability to turn night into day and day into night. Thus, time is at God’s will (Tamer). Despite interest in these two theories, however, Islamic theologians were most drawn to atomism. As historian Gerhard Böwering describes, “Muslim theologians made atomism an instrument of divine providence and held that each moment within time is the direct creation of the eternally active God. Of itself, creation is discontinuous; it appears continuous to us only because of God's compassionate consistency” (Böwering, 60). Furthermore, while God crafts time to be endless, our human perception of it is momentary; “Caught between these two modes, divine everlastingness and mortal momentariness, we human beings construct a notion of time” (Böwering, 61).

A-Theories, B-Theories, and the Unreality of Time

In 1908, philosopher J. Ellis McTaggart introduced the concepts of A-series and B-series of time. Also known as A-theories and B-theories, these labels are two ways of describing theories about time. “For the sake of brevity I shall speak of the series of positions running from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present to the, near future and the far future,

as the A series. The series of positions which runs from earlier to later I shall call the B series” (McTaggart, 458). A-theories categorize time as a past, present, and future, while B-theories categorize time in a relational sense. Thus, B-theories relate time to a greater timeline. McTaggart established these terms as part of a larger argument about time. By proving the sole existences of an A-series and B-series, he could make generalizations about time based on the conditions of those two categories. Therefore, in his paper *The Unreality of Time*, he argued both that time must behave according to the A-theories, but also that the A-theories have fallacies themselves and are not logically possible. Thus, he was able to claim that time does not exist.

Presentism

Philosophical presentism is the belief that only present entities exist. It is an A-theory of time, meaning that it assumes time as relational to other parts of time, meaning the past, present, or future, rather than relational to points in time, such as the year 1976 or the Middle Ages. Other A-theories include the spotlight, growing block, and branching future views. Because the past and future do not exist under presentism, it allows one to know for certain that one is in the present. Therefore, presentism infers that the future is open. This assumption encourages free will and informs us on the freedom one has in their choices. Although one may remember objects or experiences, presentist philosophers refer to these entities as “ex-concrete;” these objects have some value to them because “the existence of past objects and past and future times is not as hard to believe as that of past and future events” (Orilia 595).

Eternalism

Philosophical Eternalism, also known as the Block Theory, is a B-Theory based upon physics and claims that the past and future already exist in the space-time continuum. Thus, the past, present, and future are equally real. Consequently, past and future individuals are just as real as present individuals. Non-presentists such as the Eternalists argue that under presentism, if a painful event happened in the past then the ontological removal from that event renders the pain as unreal. Seeing as there cannot be a painful event without the feeling of pain, Eternalists argue that the past must simultaneously exist.

Zen Buddhism

When practicing meditation, time does not exist. While other views suggest that change takes place within time, zen monk Shunryu Suzuki explains the concept of one's actions giving time change instead. He elaborates, "You may say, 'I must do something this afternoon,' but actually there is no 'this afternoon.' We do things one after the other. That is all." Under this philosophy, one's perception of time is nearly nonexistent, as our lives are marked by actions rather than time periods themselves. This acceptance of how much time actions take allows one to fully appreciate events themselves rather than worry about the time that they take up. In this manner, Suzuki infers, one may better appreciate their life. Conversely, he argues that "When we become tired of our life we may say, 'I shouldn't have come to this place. It may have been much better to have gone to some other place for lunch. This place is not so good.' In your mind you create an idea of place separate from an actual time" (Suzuki, 30). Thus, Suzuki argues that adopting a Zen Buddhist view on life will allow one to avoid regret and find more satisfaction in one's life.

Conclusion

With each differing view of time comes a different view of life– philosophers have debated for ages about the past, present, and future. Ultimately, I hope that my summaries of descriptions of time prove above all else that one’s perspective of time and lifespan is completely subjective.

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