

TIME REFLECTIONS  
(*Wintertime, Springtime, Summertime, Fall...*)  
*An ongoing experiment.*

Time is like a fluid that can rush, pour, drip, be still, or completely frozen. But this analogy is not very useful when trying to handle the practicality of our daily lives; fluids are too volatile. We know that time is relative, not only in our experience of its passing, but also in how we visualize its shape. Despite our efforts to construct tools for managing time (calenders, clocks, etc), it seems as if these models are not good enough to satisfy our minds. What other methods do we employ in order to conceptualize time? Our inner visualizations are never addressed except for in one's own mind, yet they might hold a key to the way we function and exist. How personal are these images, and can we get a glimpse of them - even if they are only visible to ourselves? These are some of the things this experiment aims to discover.

The experiment begins with a form to be filled out by the test subject. The questions (for example "What time did you get up this morning", "What did you have for dinner last Thursday?", "What will you do next fall?" "What is your favorite time of the day?") are designed to force the subjects to consult their inner images of time in preparation for the next step. The subjects are then instructed to draw a reflection of how they picture the year, the months, the weeks, the days and the hours. This is followed by an audio interview where the subject can clarify and discuss the answers and drawings. In the first round, over 50 subjects have participated, and the experiment is planned to be continued in the near future to include an even more diverse selection of test subjects. Since the material is not yet complete, and the drawings are still being analyzed, the visual results are not made public at this point. What follows are excerpts from the audio interviews which reveal various reflections on time.

*Selected audio transcripts.*

JENNIFER:

When the form asked: "Please draw the year, the months, etc", I interpreted that as the future, not the past. When it asked about specific actions in the past, those came to me as images. But when I think about the future - and for some reason I thought of the year, the month, the week, the day as the future - the drawings became very *technical*. [...]

When I think of the year I think of two parts, summer and everything else. Summer is at one o'clock. It is the only part that is marked out, the only part that is significant. Months, I'm just counting them off. The week is a *Bell curve* with Wednesday at the highest point. So my faculty meeting next Wednesday is on top of that curve. It gets harder towards the middle of the week, then easier and easier as I descend to the weekend, at the bottom. However, since today [Sunday] feels like a Wednesday, that curve might not drop this week, it might just keep going. [...]

The idea that you can be socialized into time is really amazing, but it also means that you can be socialized out of time as well. Also the idea of time as a political concept, as consensus, is interesting. If you deviate from that, in some ways that would be the most radical rejection. If I never reset my clock and I just went on as though there wasn't *daylight savings* today, I would not be able to participate in society. What would it look like to live outside of time? It is almost impossible to conceptualize...

MICHELLE:

Today I strongly felt like it was Saturday, and I had to gradually accept that it was Sunday. [...]

The year goes around clockwise, with January at 12 o'clock. It isn't a perfect sphere, it's more like *an upside down egg*. The year has events placed onto it, like someone's birthday or wedding, but the months are blocks on a grid, separated from the year. [...]

The week is made up of projects, rather than days. I have no clear placement for Wednesday, or any day. The days bleed into each other. The week and the weekend has no distinction, probably because I work all the time. [...]

I don't see the hours as a clock, they can go in all different directions. You are always thinking about the past even if you are in the present, and you don't always go in a straight line. The same minute can act very differently. [...]

TOM B:

I think of the year as a *python who swallowed an elephant*. There's a clear beginning, a middle and an end. The elephant in the snake's belly can be larger or smaller, depending on how I perceive the time passing. The elephant's movement through the belly indicates how fast or slow the year is going by. The previous and following years are lined up after each other, stretched out, with bumps. There are no borders in between the months, it's just a movement. [...]

The week is circular, going in a clockwise direction. Sunday is in a section by itself down below, holding it all up. [...]

LENI:

Each day has its own location on a grid in my mind. The weekend is always darker. The week goes from right to left and is made up of chunks that have heft to them, it is almost between 2D and 3D. It is not quite flat and not really a cube, but it has some kind of volume. [...]

For me everything has a gender; numbers, days, months - in that quasi cenesthetic way. Monday just *couldn't* be male, it *has* to be female. Numbers too. 1, 2 and 3 are female. 5, 6, 7 are male. 8 is female, 9 and 10 are male. [...]

The months have different colors, but they are not always the same colors. I have a very precise placement for the months in my picture of the year. [...]

I wonder if growing up in an age of digital time on computers, rather than clocks, might change the way kids think about time now, if that makes it less spacial and more static?

JAMIE:

I always think visually about these things, it is a very big part of my everyday life. I usually think with colors too, not just the shape. I have always visualized it as long as I can remember, but I never materialized the visualization, so this is actually the first time. [...]

My instinct was to draw the year as a circle, but then I realized -NO, it isn't really a circle, it looks more like *a shoe*. [...]

April is the most important month to me by far. It's a *new beginning*, and it represents change - I love change - and the change in season is most apparent in spring when you're actually seeing things bloom.

*Many people would associate New Year's with a new beginning?*

Oh no, never! I don't do that, that's interesting. [...]

The year is a very clear picture in my mind, it does not change depending on plans or from year to year, it is always the same. The week looks completely different, like a *big letter D*.

TOM H:

The world map is incorporated into the image of the seasons. The year is the earth cut into pieces.

The north is up at the top, with the wintertime stuff going on. And as you get down, you get into your summertime. I know it doesn't work that way, but... When I think about wintertime, I think about Boston, Alaska, that part of my geographic reference. And when I think about summertime, I think about my grandparents down in Florida, and I think about my family in California. Part of why this is, I think, is the way my family was split up when I was growing up. I would go to school in California in the fall and the spring, and then I would go back to Boston for the winter. [...]

The year has to be a circle, it could never be a line. *A line is a crazy idea!* I would be too depressed to think about it as a line, because there has to be an end to the line. The circle, on the other hand, keeps going. [...]

I feel bad for people who live near the equator. Things never change, it's the same shit all the time, that would be horrible.

ESPERANZA:

I generally don't remember what year it is. I still think it's 2008. I don't like planning, so I don't like thinking about time. I have no idea what I really did the last couple of days, nor do I want to remember. And since I don't like planning, I change plans a lot. [...]

The obsession of time is here, in Venezuela time is almost meaningless because the climate is always the same. People here in this part of America had to be practical because of the harvest and the cold weather and seasons, so you have to plan ahead. For example, the thing here of doing your taxes and having to write down how much money you have spent on coffee the whole year drives me crazy! I don't want to know if I spent 100 or a 1000 dollars on coffee, I just want to enjoy the coffee. If it's less money than I thought -great! If it's more -unfortunate, but I hope I had a good time. [...] It's not just a difference in climate, it's also cultural difference. Here in the USA it's very common to be paid *by the hour*. In Venezuela you get paid a salary by the month. Here there's an obsession with time and hours. [...]

In my country - and maybe I'm generalizing - there is an obsession with the past, and here in America there's an obsession with the future. [...]

Time is meaningless. When you are having a good time, a day feels like 10 minutes. But when you're having a shitty day, a day can feel like a whole year. I understand that society needs to have a structure in terms of time, for people to be able to function in it, but it's not how the brain works in my opinion. [...]

Time is important but I don't like thinking about time. My freedom is that I have no sense of time.

ANDREW:

The questions made me think deeply about my future and what I want to do. The past was really easy to remember. [...]

I always keep the end in mind, how I want things to be. By keeping the end in mind, I feel like I will always fulfill my ideal of how I want things to be. Because in New York you can become so distracted. [...]

I didn't really have any visual images of the past, I just remembered - which was kind of unfortunate because I thought I would be very visual about stuff, since I studied film...

TYLER:

The questions were deceptively easy. Some of the questions were much more difficult than I expected them to be upon reading them. The difference between the question and the mental exercise was surprising. [...]

The questions about the future I think I almost entirely got right, because the questions about the future allow you to be as specific as you want. I think I got it more right in the future than I did in the past which is a strange thing. [...]

The year is a descending diagonal. It is a score across the page. It's not so much a map or a graph, it's more an impression. I feel like the energy of the year is organized in that way.

*Would next year be placed on top or continue below?*

I think it would be placed on top. For me it is both linear and foldable, there is this idea that you can fold it along its inverse crease, and it always has an identical relation to itself. But you are not folding along this "form of the known", you are folding along the unconventional axis. The diagonal implies a broader potential space than if you drew a line this way [vertically] on the page, it [the diagonal line] is not constrained by the architecture of the page.

*But it is descending though, it is almost as if your life is going down hill?*

It could be... I think that there is a certain type of entropy that develops over the course of the year, and one superficially renews oneself at the end. It is sort of a portrait of an entropic process, but that does not mean I am wholly negative or pessimistic about it. [...]

The week is sort of a cross section of the month. It's what I see when I zoom in on the line. [...] I guess that you could almost say that these are like sine waves. In the same way that the sine wave is mapped out on a graph, it is also a repetitive structure. That's how I'm looking at these things; these are generic structural parts that become specific when they are mapped out on a trajectory. So these are different "powers of time", to the negative 10 to the 10, and so on. [...] It is like that EAMES<sup>1</sup> video, you are zooming in and out and the smallest unit and the largest unit are almost exactly identical. [...]

HANNA:

The first questions were easy. Although I frequently forget how old I am. Someone was trying to tell me I was 28, and I thought, "Oh my god, I am 28". But I'm not. And even now when I say it, I'm thinking - maybe I am 28? But I think I'm 27, I'm pretty sure I'm turning 28 this summer. [...]

When trying to keep track of my activities, it's like those people in the Thanksgiving Day parade who have those big balloons and there is all the strings that they have to hold on to. I'm just trying to keep track of all the different strings, and they get loose, and you have to chase after them and sometimes there are just a lot of *loose strings* flying around. [...]

I think of one year as a tube, and I'm being pushed through it. And I come out on the other side. And in January I have to get in to the tube again. Maybe it could be an irregular tube, there can be different tubes for each year.

*Could it sometimes be like a water slide and you get flushed out?*

Yeah, like the year is just happening to you...

---

<sup>1</sup> **Powers of Ten** is a 1968 short documentary film written and directed by Ray Eames and her husband, Charles Eames. The film depicts the relative scale of the Universe in factors of ten.

ROBERT:

Space, time and mortality, I think about it every day, all the time. [...]

I like dusk, I like every thing that is at the end of things, the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of the year, the end of the month. It's weird, I never thought about that before! [...]

The year is blue, like the sky. The months are like a cake, *a cigarette cake*. The layers of the cake are the months, piled up. In that image, the week is like a solid chunk, *a brick*. [...]

When I think about the week on its own, it's more like an ellipse. It is in 3D, I think about everything spatially, so it's hard to draw that flat. It's a weird shape, like an ellipse where one of the ends is really tight and compressed [the weekend]. *A tear drop* shape. [...]

You have to listen to this song by Sonic Youth. It's called Pipeline Kill Time, and it ends with "we should kill time", and it's all about ending time, and what that would mean.

CARIS:

I picture the year almost like a wheel, or like a compass. So when someone tells me that their birthday is in November, I picture it to the *northwest* of me. And if someone says their birthday is in July, I picture it below me. The year is stationary, the months have very specific places. In terms of sensing where I am in the spectrum of the year, I feel as if I'm moving along this giant wheel, and my body feels differently as I'm shifting. [...]

I always see each week in terms of seven days, and then I see the week shifting like on a *conveyor belt*. The "now" is usually in the middle - it doesn't stop, it keeps going. So I always see a little bit of the past and a little bit of the future, before it disappears. But when I think about the past, it goes into something different, the week becomes more fixed and concrete. The present is always moving, and the recent past is always connected to it, but the distant past has fallen off the conveyor belt. It's funny cause I never really thought about how I think about it, but I guess this is exactly how I think about it! [...]

*So when do you think these images formed?*

I think I always pictured it this way, I just never thought about it, and I think it was only in the recent years that I wondered if other people pictured it the same way. [...]

When I think of the day, I think of the time rising. I think of the morning as being low, and then as it gets later, time is stacked in the air like a tower. So when I think of things going on in my day, I think of them as lower and higher of each other. I know it doesn't really make sense when I try to explain it, but when I think of my morning, I picture it below me somehow. My plans for the rest of the night are somewhere up here above me, they just haven't happened yet.

*What happens when you are doing an all-nighter? Does time continue up, up, up, even if you are awake so late it is technically morning? When does it switch to the bottom?*

That's interesting...I don't know... I think I just feel like I'm at the tippy-top. And then maybe at some point I feel a sensation of being at the bottom again. That's a really good question. Next time I stay up all night, I'll try to think about where I assess myself in time.

*To be continued...*