

L'APERTURA // THE OPENING

Sarah Stein in Conversation with Giangavino Pazzola and Enrico Piras

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GP/EP: In the dimension that is revealed to the protagonist of *The Opening*, the sensible knowledge of this reality is only accessible through objects, shapes which act as a filter. In this work objects are bridges, links from an "informative unit" which manifests itself into surfaces, expressing a non-linear information, connecting different dimensions. It seems that your interest is in the field of aesthetic harmony, the concordance in the combination of various shapes, as well as that of the meaning and relations between bodies/shapes.

Can you tell us which process is at the core of the definition of shape in your research? Is shape a conscious medium or an instinctive and visceral bond to the unknown?

Trying to simplify with an example I would say that this "informative unit" is the dimension, the other world the protagonist finds himself in. This dimension becomes accessible only through objects, that are like facilitators for the access to this world, and they (the objects) are surfaces that reflect this new dimension. So this sentence would mean that the information from this world is given in a non-linear way, because this dimension is fragmented and variable through the filters/objects.

SS: Rather than aesthetic harmony, which would imply that my interest is in everything fitting together in an orderly and pleasing way, I would say that I am more interested in an aesthetic resonance—an amplification and echoing of certain qualities. Forms, and the relations between them, are visual records of this kind of resonance. The relationships between people and forms are complex, and I am as much interested in the way forms evolve outside of human interaction. The way forms evolve means they carry certain evidence of their evolution within their physical manifestation. There are reasons why structures develop the way they do, but there is also randomness, or chance within this process. So a manifestation of form has both of these opposing forces within it: the reasons and imperative functions for its development, as well as elements of chaos encountered along the way. I am interested in the ways this development of form is parallel to how we develop knowledge, even consciousness, and how we cope with the unknown.

In English, the word "form" has many meanings, it is a noun and a verb. I use the term to reference a number of related but distinct things, form is a physical shape (as an object), but it is also a structure (as in the form of a story). Form is morphology, the boundaries of one thing against the rest of the world. It is also the process of becoming.

I am interested in form as both visible and invisible structure, and in finding ways to understand the invisible through the visible. This points to limitations (our own limitations) but at the same time pushes us to continually expand. When you ask if it is a conscious medium, this could be interpreted in a number of ways, but one interpretation could be, do forms themselves have consciousness, do they have an awareness or choice in the way they develop? Does a snowflake or a beehive have a choice in its structure? Does a human organism, or a poem? What are the forces that shape these forms? This is a very interesting question, that I can't fully answer. This kind of

question is why the visceral bond to the unknown is so important, it inspires the questions that we continue to research the answers to.

In the dimension or reality that the protagonist encounters, only fragments are available to him through objects, that act as filters. It is not the dimension that is fragmented, rather his ability to understand it is fragmented. The objects are bridges, transporters, but the information is incomplete, changing, and imperfect.

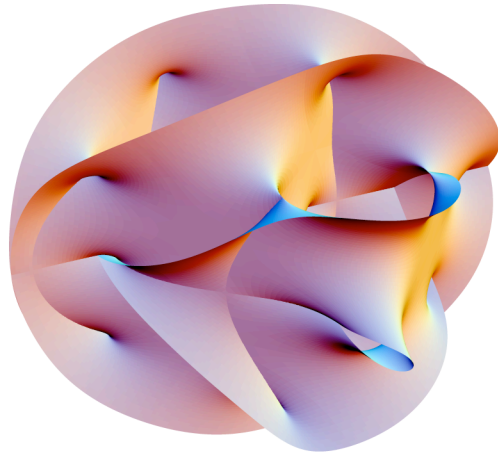
GP/EP: In your narrative, shapes stimulate emotional reactions in the protagonist, but they also reveal an aesthetic value. Their value is also a cultural one—this cultural value is in relation to the objects you purpose in the narrative, but also in the exhibition. How do you address the themes of iconography (as description and classification of images) and iconoclasm (and the idea of idolatry, the cult of the images) ?

SS: Iconography, iconoclasm, and idolatry as associated phenomena all deal with human relationships to images. What I think is really important is the process of how and why meaning is assigned, and how it can be pulled apart and rearranged. Icons can be visual clichés, and this can have a useful function – they represent shared history and common understanding. At the same time, I think it's important to try to disrupt these accepted meanings and give images a chance to stand anew, for what they are at one particular moment, knowing they will be something completely different at any future point.

In the narrative I have created, there is definitely a strong relationship to nature, and forms of the natural world are deeply revered by the protagonist. I don't really see this as idolatry. To worship an image is to make it one-dimensional and ignore what it truly is, and that is the opposite of what I am interested in. I think it's imperative to be conscious of what an image means to you, and why. To accept visual representations without question is comparable to blindness.

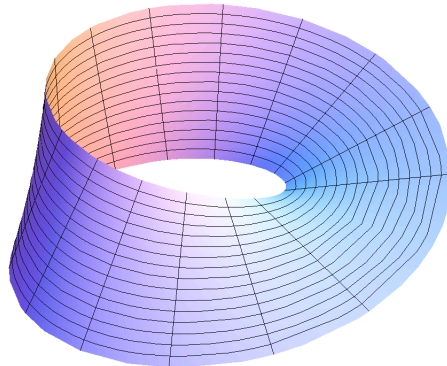
EP/GP: I would like to go back to the relation with shapes and structures, and ask you how do you imagine the relation between the different dimensions that the protagonist of the opening is experiencing. It made me think about the Möbius strip, a surface with one side and, most important, only one boundary component. In the narrative the boundaries between inside and outside are topics that you address continuously. I know it's not easy, but how would you imagine and describe the architecture of these different layers or dimensions that you're relating to? How would a geography of your narrative look like?

SS: When I was thinking of the different dimension the protagonist encounters, I had been thinking of space in terms of the the Calabi–Yau manifold used in String theory, in which every point of space becomes a manifold. String theory calls for extra dimensions beyond four (three dimensions with time being the fourth). My interest is in not in studying the mathematics or physics of this, but in considering the implications for human thought once we begin to conceive of space in this way.



Calabi-Yau manifold, Wikipedia

I also have been influenced by the labyrinths and narrative style of Jorges Louis Borges, in cutting through and seeing across space and time. I wrote “The Opening” as part of my MA thesis, and more than a geography of a real space, I was considering the structure of a text itself based on the Möbius strip as a model, that is to say, that it comes back on itself and each time the text is encountered it is a different encounter because something has shifted along the way.



Möbius strip

In one of the uses of the Möbius strip in contemporary art, Lygia Clark used a paper model in her work, *Walking*, in which she cut along the middle of the strip, and each time she came back to the beginning, she was faced with a choice: go left, or go right. Each time, the strip became thinner

and thinner until eventually it was cut through. I am interested in the way this acts as a metaphor for learning through experience. I was trying to relate this structure, through narrative, to patterns of behaviour and the influence this has on the structure of knowledge. I address the boundaries between inside and outside in the story, but I guess I was interested in exploring them in a more fluid way – more like folds, and in how they are connected rather than standing in opposition.

EP/GP: To make experience of a place, we need to be physically located somewhere, and our gaze experience a dynamic relationship with objects. Our character exercises a field of attention in the space, where objects assume the function of pointers (does it make sense?), they offer us a sense of durability and stability. How do you address the topic of memory and memories in your research?

SS: In my research I have addressed memory is a process, part of a system of perception and understanding that is unfixed and changing. I have done other work with memory, and how to convey something of its delicate and ephemeral qualities. I'm especially interested in the moments when memory is vulnerable, or uncertain, and ways of adapting to these circumstances. The objects do assume a role of durability and stability, even though they also indicate that there is much more knowledge in the world than the character has access to. The objects act as lifelines, and it is these relationships that create value for the character, a kind of invisible net of knowledge and comfort.