



“...memory is of no use unless the future is like the past.”

—Gerald M. Weinberg

“100 bottles of beer on the wall,
100 bottles of beer...”

—*anonymous drinking song*

Abstract: A freeform essay of sorts for the artist of the 21st century—a collage of aphorisms and old saws pasted on the back of a well-worn cocktail napkin—a few words to live by. Not quite ramblings. Not quite a rant. Just a realization that it’s easier than we make it. Do we really need all these “theories”? (Well maybe one more.) Technology changes too quickly to be of much consequence anymore; it’s what we do with it that matters. These days we can pretty much do anything we want. Let’s tell stories. The proto-structure of the loop takes care of the rest.

Capo

It’s all loops. As far as the eye can see. As far as the ear can hear. In time. Loops are the foundation of our experience of time and, so it follows, any time-based art. Which of course is all art, as we perceive nothing without time. (Odd that time is taught as 4D in art schools, when in truth it is primary, viewing a painting is a temporal experience.)

Not space. Time. We don’t need space. We can see without space, with our eyes closed. We visualize. We dream. We feel. We silently tell ourselves secret stories. Without time, however, means dead. With time means present (the now), past (the remembrance of yesterday) and future (the promise of tomorrow).

Anywhere there is a repeat there is time, there is structure. If we have no repeat we have noise—no structure. Where there is structure, because we have repetition, we begin to predict. We anticipate recurrence. When we predict we have expectations, we desire. Tension enters. We seek the future in the past; we look for a resolution of the tension, a return of the repeat, the pattern, the loop.

Traces of memory, lived again; structure is simple repetition. Through recognition of a repeated process we have power, predictive power. From this power we gain security in our reality and a belief that we are not powerless—the sun will rise in the morning, the rain will fall in spring. The moon will rise full every month. Tuesday will follow Monday. These things have happened before and before and before. We predict they will happen again and again and again. We discern structure and use it to predict. The future and the past embrace in the present. Traces of memory lived, living and to be lived.

The future is in the present, as is the past. Some dimension of experience in the future is experienced in the now in a loop. The loop moves us securely into the future. Order is perceived, our power confirmed. Through endless recurrence, we anticipate with faith, we predict. We desire.

We live with desire. Life is simply the desire for things to be different. We seek to resolve the tension inherent in desire, resolved through the achievement of a desire. Only to return with a new desire. Desire itself is in a loop.

Loops move us through time in a dynamic way through a pattern of tension and a resolution. It is music. Western harmony for instance. We call it tonality. Tonal music establishes stability, a scale, a key, a tonic—the tonal center or base. We are safe there, we are home. Then we get bored, we yearn for something else. We leave this tonal center as if on a quest. We move through dissonance, discord, conflict. We soon seek a return to comfort, a return to harmonic stability. Once there we grow restless, a new desire for difference and we leave the center again.¹ And we again return. I-IV-V-I, IV-V-I, IV-V-I...the mantra of every first year music student.³ Tension-release-tension-release...a loop.

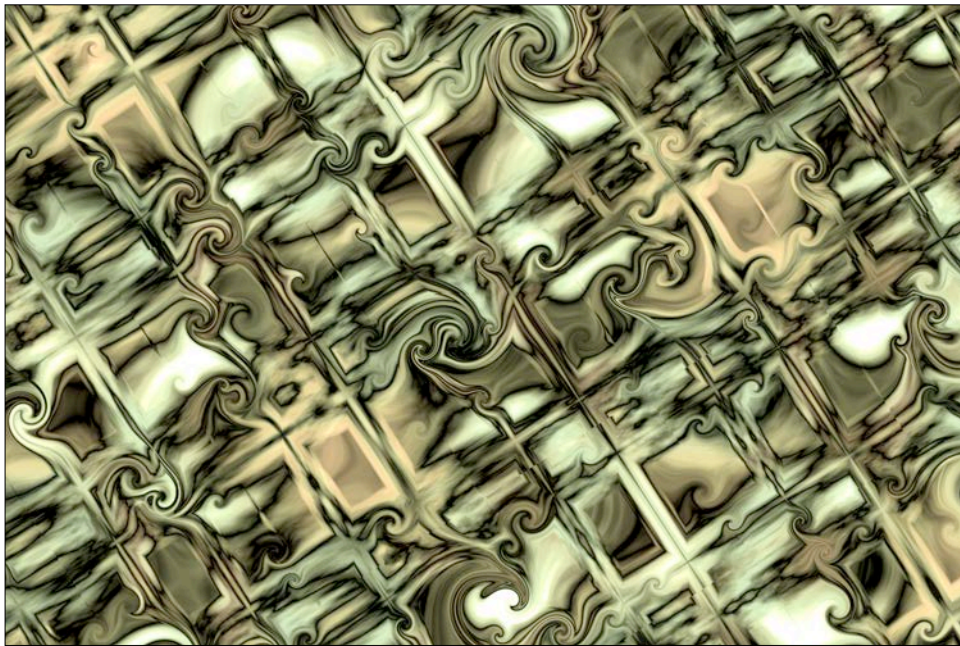


Figure 1: Still Frame from ‘Calidri’ by Brian Evans

Composers call this structure narrative. It is narrative. The plot is abstract, the characters are Pythagorean—ratios seeking simpler and simpler expression. It is discord to concord. It is conflict seeking consonance. It is how time passes for us. Time is conflict, seeking resolution. The desire for things to be different. A narrative. A loop.

Loops provide the stable surface upon which we live our lives. Some dimension, some aspect of our experience, our perceptions, is repeating in a loop. It’s coffee and a muffin at sunup for breakfast, sycamore leaves turning crimson to grocery-bag brown in October, lightning bugs in July, icicles in January, moonlight at midnight, news at eleven.

Repetition brings us structure, and a sense of control. It is variation that keeps it interesting. Not everything different, just parts. If everything changes it is chaos, moving us towards noise. For breakfast, keep the sunrise, but let's make it orange juice and buttered toast. Clouds cover the moon tonight (but I know it is still there). And at the base of life, oxygen to carbon-dioxide, a pedal point, constant, holding it all together.

At the base is teleology—a goal—a purpose—a resolution. It is theatre. It is story.⁴ Boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl...a plot...time moves forward with an itinerary to follow. We anticipate it. We predict it based on past experience. We desire. A goal is reached, a plot point achieved, setting up a new desire and the loop begins again. A new entry in our daily planner. A birthday circled on a wall calendar. A wake-up call. The process is traditionally linear, but it doesn't have to be.

Sometimes the goal isn't reached. The girl gives up on the boy and she gets a new boy, or does something completely different, but she's still there, in action. We miss a meeting. We sleep in. We travel half-way 'round the globe and day is night, Autumn is Spring. Something is different. A surprise, a variation. This brings a new desire and the loop begins again. There is no stopping the process. It's structure whether we like it or not.

A loop works best with three points (action, fueled by desire, connects tension to resolution). It's a plane, a surface, a ground upon which to build. Two points make a line. It is possible to backtrack, but that is not a very interesting loop, just symmetry. A loop can be so much more than simple symmetry. Besides life is too complex, too interesting for simply raveling and unraveling. (Let's leave that to science.)

Circuits are better. It can be progress. On the page it's a circle. If we watch it unfold in time it's a wave, the temporal expression of a circle. It's waves that fire signals in the retina or the cochlea. If we hear it, if we see it, in the sensorium it's a wave, in time, repeating. All signals are loops. If there is any repetition in the signal, it is data. If it is all random, then it is not really a signal. It is noise. But what is noise really? For us it is the promise of data. Without the possibility of repetition, without the promise of structure, we have nothing. (I know for certain we have more than nothing. I am not so certain about things beyond that, but I know that.) So we have a pair, a binary opposition, noise/data.

Noise is noise by the absence of repetition, yet there is always the possibility of repetition; a tension sustains until repetition occurs and noise slips into data, into signal. A resolution, but now there is the possibility of noise, a chance that the center won't hold, a new tension. The struggle for structure. Just breathe.

Tension-release—binary perhaps, opposition maybe...but truly two components of a unary process,⁵ the loop, the hank, the mechanism of desire. Neither is privileged, each is dependent on the other as a part of life. Life but a hanker for things to be different.

Deconstruction emphasizes a co-dependent relationship of opposites. One needs the other as the process seeks to equalize, to subvert privilege, oscillating back and forth in time, not a mirror, but a process of tension-release partnered in a dance, a wave, a unary process. Constant change.

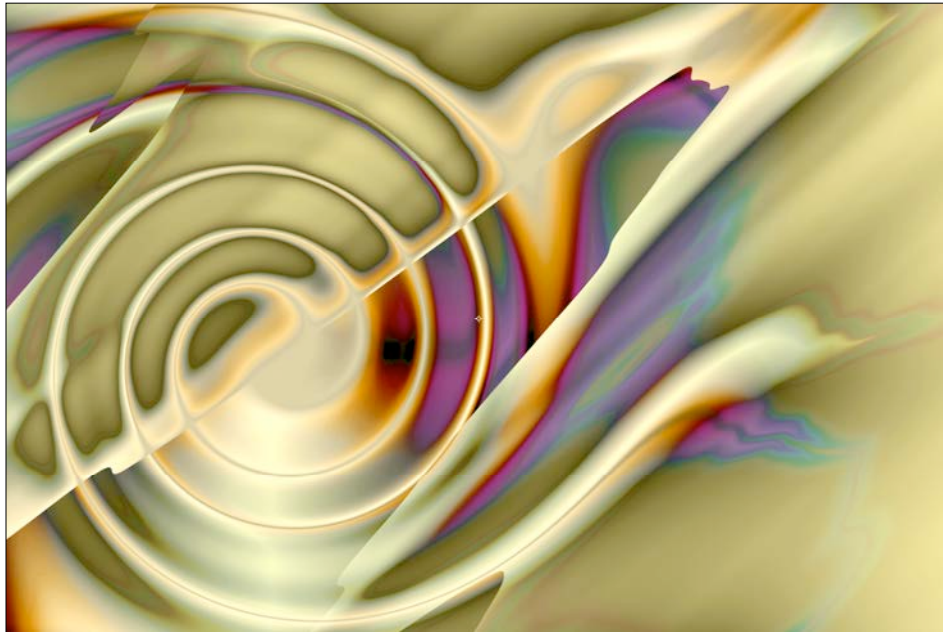


Figure 2: Still Frame from 'Pipilo' by Brian Evans

The very act of deconstruction is a loop. The “equalization” of binary opposites. The tension of privilege shifts from one to the other. A slippage. An oscillation of focus. A world view transfigured and transfigured again. A drama played out with text, with intertextuality, with signal, with noise. A reforming of relationships of power, seeking equality and freedom. A desire. A narrative, Grand or little. A loop. Deconstruction is a loop that reconstructs itself. So the loop is proto-structure. No structure is noise, with noise defined by what it is not. Not signal. Not data. The opposition describes the dance, the loop. Binary oppositions reduce to a unary loop. Signal/noise. Something/nothing. Living/dead.

Life is temporal, so desire itself is a temporal process that structures time for us. (It became linear when we learned to count. Stop counting.) Hierarchies of conflict, levels of tension, strata of needs seeking resolution, food, warmth, sleep, love. We seek multi-tiered resurrection of stasis and comfort in a world that provides neither without action. (Do something.) It's music. Counterpoint in many voices. Loops both horizontal and vertical. A fugal unfolding of time in layers and layers of conflict and desire.

The inherent chaos of the real (not entropy as the system is not closed) works to keep things moving. Simple symmetry is impossible in life, hence the always striving—desire and action.

“Are you going to eat those fries?”

“Put another log on the fire.”

“Can I get another pillow?”

“Join me for coffee.”

We exist in the cyclic order of life with our perception of the real coming through sensors that respond to a wave. Planetary cycles of day, month, year, manifested in wake/sleep, light/dark, wax/wane, summer/winter. Cycles of in/out, up/down, growth/decay, yin/yang. Cycles of high/low, win/lose, right/left, rich/poor...so many loops.

A hierarchy of temporalities, all spinning from the center of the individual and the collective—seeking a resonance. We call it culture—our attempts to agree on objects of desire and methods of achievement. Seeking to resolve the conflicts. Some resolve. New ones appear. I try to make sense of the babble. From the noise, I seek a hint of an axiom that might allow me to return to a haven of meaning. The loop holds it together. The chaos keeps it interesting. What is chaos really? A hidden context. An invisible conflict. A loop unseen, bubbling beneath the surface. Repeat the drumbeat, again, and again, but change the lyric. Give me the same and give me different. Keep it stable. Keep it interesting. Tell me a story.

Perhaps not rational, but in my personal, quiet will-to-power I secure a belief in a small narrative, a belief in some control over an outcome, some control through a brief passage of my life. I look to loops. I start with cycles, physical, noetic, textual, cultural, like little “strings,” a simple theory of everything upon which to build a simple way of living and creating. (*Da Capo*)

Notes

1. This puts us in quite a pickle as we only feel secure in sameness. Borges reminds us that “to think is to forget a difference....”² We map sensation to memory, looking for a pattern, but that gets boring. We prowl for the previous, while honing for the new.
2. Borges, Jorge Luis, “Funes, the Memorious,” in *Ficciones*, edited by John Sturrock (original publication 1942; English translation, Grove Press, 1962).
3. For jazz students it’s usually II-V-I, but either way it’s a cycle around a circle of fifths—a sonic loop-de-loop.
4. A story wraps around a narrative scaffold while teaching us something. Stories are lessons. Lessons make meaning. Meaning is making sense. To make sense, to understand, is a strong desire that drives all of us—a fundamental loop.
5. An oxymoron actually, but I like the poetry of it.