

**YEAR: A STUDY IN
CREATING SPACE
WITH COLOR**

Michael Betancourt, 410 Chester Avenue, Moorestown, NJ 08057, U.S.A. E-mail: <mb17033@bellsouth.net>.

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The 12 sequences of my video work *Year* are organized around the birthdays of people I know, one per month. This connection gives a human dimension to an otherwise abstract work. I tried to match the general mood of each sequence to the person it corresponds with. This provided a framework for the structure and color choices in each sequence and prompted the choice of the opening epigraph, from William Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*:

we see which way the stream of time doth
run
and are enforced from our most quiet
there
by the rough current of occasion

Celebrations provide a conclusion to what has gone before while preparing us for what is yet to come. They are an interruption of our routines, and they make us aware of the ways in which, most of the time, our lifeworld is strictly limited to what we expect and anticipate. *Year* is an attempt to explore

and experience those things that we do not normally notice because we are too busy. Because abstraction simply *is*, it has the potential to make us see differently.

Year makes use of both digital artifacts and analog processing effects to create its abstract imagery (Color Plate A No. 1). The movie explores our ability to visualize space and movement through color. Compression artifacts present us with a readymade image of interpretation and memory made visible by the technical properties of our technology. Digital signal decay is an almost inevitable consequence of working with compressed video, and the presence of these artifacts is magnified by successive generations of processing. Portions of *Year* were also processed with analog machinery during my residency at the Experimental Television Center in Owego, New York, allowing me to draw together more than a decade of studio experiments with color, space, motion and perception [1].

The movie can be seen in two variations, which differ in how color acts to create space: a stereoscopic version and a flat version. Which version we see depends on how we watch the movie. We watch the flat version as we would any movie, with the space appearing through traditional techniques of overlapping planes and perspective. In the other version, however, the viewer wears Chromadepth™ glasses, which

produce a virtual 3D space based upon color separation by wavelength of light—red is foreground and blue is background, with the rest of the spectrum falling in between. The video technology complicates these spatial relationships, and new possibilities for presenting space through color appear as a result of video's way of creating color on-screen.

The spaces seen in *Year* when viewed through the Chromadepth glasses are in excess of what we might expect from this 3D technology based on its more common use with photographs and other printed matter. Because video creates its colors through the optical mixing of red, green and blue, the spaces we see with Chromadepth—even when watching apparently monochromatic sequences—open up what we would expect to be a “flat” space to hidden volumes. This is a new effect, previously unknown with Chromadepth. Our perceptions are subtler, and our ability to distinguish space through color variation greater, than we generally assume. This revelation about our senses corresponds with what *Year* celebrates about these birthdays: the unseen qualities of the people whose birthdays provide the basis for each sequence.

Reference

1. Some of my notes on this process were published in *Structuring Time: Notes on Making Movies* (Holicong, PA: Wildside Press, 2004).