TEMPORALITY IN STATIC VISUAL NARRATIVES: BASED ON EVENT, TIME, SPACE & PLACE RELATION

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Stories are a sequence of events that unfold in time and space. Temporality is one of the fundamental elements that makes a Static Visual Narrative (SVN). To understand 'time' in an SVN, one has to read the compositional space within which the story unfolds. Space (in an SVN) more often than not implies the 'Location or Place' where the event occurs. Acknowledging the presence of 'Time-Space (Place)' unit in an SVN, helps comprehend the 'event' or 'progression of events' in a story that is illustrated. In this paper we first understand what 'Event, 'Time', 'Space' and 'Place' mean as individual concepts and study their graphic representational possibilities. Next, we identify patterns of 'Event [Time–Space (Place)]' unit based on the representational possibilities and collate our findings in a table. Finally we support our findings with examples of SVNs demonstrating the employment of the patterns identified. Thus, our study shows that Space in an SVN is designed based on the metaphor of Place or Location of the event.

Keywords: Static Visual Narratives (SVN), Event, Time, Space, Place.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stories revolve around actions, human or otherwise, that occur in space and unfold in time [1]. How to represent a story in a Static Visual Narrative (henceforth SVN) format is a question that has jogged the minds of many visual communication designers. A story, being by definition a sequence of events, one cannot bypass the problem of representing temporality. In SVNs temporal progress is alluded to by the spatial layout of the story. 'Time' and (compositional) 'Space' are two of the indispensable elements one deals with when viewing an SVN. One cannot be understood without acknowledging the other, as the element of time is 'intrinsically connected' to space. SVN's then presents a classic exemplar of a chronotope. The perceptual properties of the 'story time' presented and the meaning it evokes vary as the spatial arrangement of the story represented varies. Temporality is used as a tool in the construction of the 'story time' as one reads the SVN. It is with reference to the presentation of 'story time' that we discuss temporality in this paper. The viewer's eyes transverse the story-space following the events of the story as they unfold in time at locations recreated virtually by the designer. It is our belief that compositional Space in an SVN signifies the Place where the event occurred. This belief is based on the fact that the story unfolds in time and occurs at some place. Space in an SVN is what is employed by the designer to represent the Time and Place mentioned in the story. The objective of this paper is to discover — What are the various ways of depicting an event or a set of events?

Presuppositions: We know that temporality in an SVN is depicted by spatial arrangement of events. Our working hypothesis is that 'Space' and 'Place' in an SVN are closely related. In fact, we believe that the 'Place' where the event occurs is used as a rational to model the compositional 'Space' in an SVN. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal. If time and space in an SVN are two sides of the same coin and Space and Place are related, then what are the ways in which the Event [Time-Space (Place)] unit or Iconographic Unit is expressed? This is the question we set out to explore.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTS: 'EVENT', 'TIME, 'PLACE', 'SPACE' AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF GRAPHICALLY REPRESENTING THEM

To appreciate any SVN one has to understand how the 'narrative-time' and 'place' where the event happened is perceived and expressed by the designer using 'representational space'. Ideas about time and place vary from culture to culture and period to period [2]. How does the designer represent a series of events that is temporal in nature on a static medium? Before we try to unravel the process of representing a story that the designer might possibly employ; we shall first comprehend the concepts - Event, Time, Place and Space, that we will encounter. We begin by first understanding these as individual concepts and later examining them in the context of the SVN. We then investigate SVNs and discuss techniques found, employing the Event [Time-Space (Place)] unit by designers to express temporality of the story.

2.1. Event

A story or an episode is a sequence of events (an event is the smallest part of a story). Thus an event is the smallest part of a story. For e.g. In the story of Adam and Eve; the episode 'Creation of Adam', the events are 1) God took some clay; 2) Created man and 3) Blew life into him. A story or an episode is a sequence of events. These can be diagrammatically represented as Figure 1; where E represents event. We have the faculty to perceive events as occurring either simultaneously or sequentially [3]. An event is made up of actions taking place at a point of time, unfolding at a certain place and occupying a specific space. What is actually represented in an SVN is a visual 'moment' of an event. Thus in an SVN an event can further be divided into a number of visual moments.

In stories, events unfold either in a sequence or concurrently. The designer therefore has the option of representing 1) one event from a sequence of events, 2) two events that occur concurrently or 3) a set of events that unfold successively.

2.2. Time

Time is a concept used to measure duration or interval between events [4]. Its characteristics are: It is continuous, Moments are bound to time, Moments occur sequentially in time. People use visual metaphors such as the timeline to represent time. It is a one dimensional graphic where temporal flow is depicted by a straight line; on which moments (M1-M4 in Figure 2) are shown as markers. Human beings have the capacity to distinguish between three types of time viz. a) a single moment, b) a set of connected moments and c) discrete moments [5]. In this paper we will work with only the first two types of time.

What we mean by narrative- time is the sequence of events unfolding. Narrative-time is dependent on the subject matter of the story and how the designer chooses to tell it. Using the metaphor of a timeline to help elucidate the structure of a story we have Figure 3. A narrative-timeline has a beginning and an end intersperse with events (E1-E4) in between. The timeline provides a framework to show events that occur in a sequence.

People can differentiate between one point of time and continuous time. The designer has a choice of employing one of two kinds of time to show temporality in an SVN.
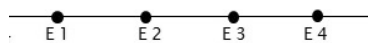

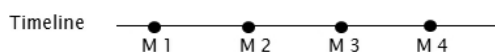**Figure 1.** Representation of Events (E) or episode of a story.

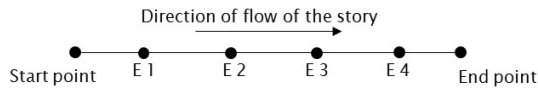**Figure 2.** Passage of time visualized as moments (M1–M4) on a timeline.

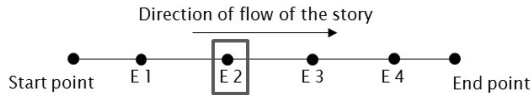**Figure 3.** Narrative-time represented as a straight line.

Figure 4. One event is selected to be represented.

a) 'One Point of Time' Technique

    1) In this technique, the designer decides to showcase a particular event from the story, as a frozen transient moment of time. In Figure 4, E1- E4 represents events on the narrative-timeline. E2 is the event chosen by the designer to illustrate.

    2) Sometimes in the story two events unfold together or concurrently (at different places) as in 5.

b) 'Continuous Time' Technique

A series of events are perceived as unfolding sequentially. This rational is employed to indicate progression of the story. We call this the 'continuous time' technique. In Figure 6 the designer chooses events E2, E3, E4 to be represented in the SVN.

    In doing so she encounters the problem of temporality and negotiates the disability of the static medium by implanting markers to suggest movement. Continuous narratives depict successive events of an episode or successive episodes of a story, repeating the figure of the protagonist or illustrating a number of instants that are linked by causality in the course of the narrative. Consecutive time frames are presented within a single visual field, with or without any dividers to distinguish one time frame from the next. In this technique, temporal progression is indicated by spatial movement. The sequence in which the events or episodes unfold may in some cases be explicitly represented or implied. The comprehension of continuous narrative requires awareness that more than one moment of time is presented within a single visual frame, and that the multiple appearances of the protagonist indicate successive moments of time in which the action occurs. This technique heavily relies on the viewers knowledge of decoding the SVN presented.
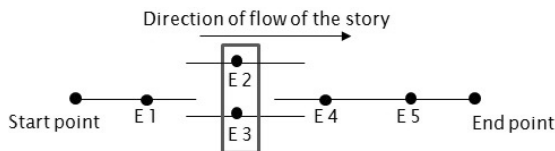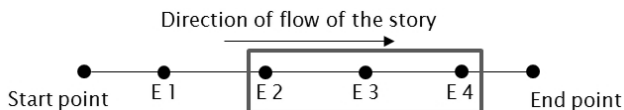

Figure 5. Two events unfolding concurrently.

Figure 6. A set of events E3 to E4 selected to be represented.

2.3. Place (Location of the story)

What is meant here by 'Place' is the location where the said event unfolds. The place or scene of the event is in most cases mentioned by the author of the story either explicitly (e.g. on the moon, in Arizona, etc) or is implied by other clues provided in the story.

One of the ways the designer can represent the story could be using the metaphor of the 'Place' or location where the event took place. The designer can map this location onto the surface of the medium. Places or locations thus function as an anchor point. There are various ways through which designers convey the locations to the viewer; such as, creating background scenery to indicate the site of event.

We can differentiate between a specific place and also one place in relation to another (here and there), by the distance between them. An event in a story can unfold at one place at one point of time or many events can unfold at many places at one (and the same) point of time (simultaneous).

2.4. Space (Representational Space)

Space is undefined until it is articulated by the placement of an object within it [6] or demarcated by a boundary around it. Human beings with the faculty of orientation make sense of the space. We use ourselves or objects as anchor points to navigate through space; making use of the X, Y or Z axis to locate our position. Space is employed to measure the distance between two places or events. Thus we can differentiate between one particular (explicitly or implicitly) demarcated space and other spaces [7].

By 'space' we mean the compositional space the artist uses to represent the story in visual form. The artist creates a virtual space within which the story or part of the story unfolds. This is done by using a device called the 'frame'. Internal dividers may also be utilized to differentiate between different spaces, within the composition. On a 2D surface we can represent spaces (Figure 7), and identify spaces as A) a specific space Sz; B) distinct spaces next to each other S1 & S2; and c) spaces placed one in front of the other S3 & S4.

3. EVENT [TIME-SPACE (PLACE)] — THE ICONOGRAPHIC UNIT

Although events and objects exist in time; in an SVN, time cannot be perceived without resorting to space. It is through reading the placement of agents or cluster of agents (signifying events) that one recognizes and follows the 'narrative time' in an SVN. The space demarcated in an SVN most times signifies the Place i.e. the site of the action.

The most basic iconographic unit in an SVN is one that signifies a single event (E), unfolding at a specific time (T), at a particular place (P), that is represented at a certain space(S) within the SVN. Thus the Event [Time-Space (Place)] unit is created. Since it is our belief that space in an SVN uses place as a metaphor we represent place enclosed within brackets. Having understood Event, Time, Space and Place as individual concepts and viewing the possibility of graphically representing them we can come up with a table of possible combinations. These are based on the capacity of human beings to perceive the difference between the following:

Event: One event (1E)/two or more events (2 or more E)
Time: One point of time (1 pt. of T)/Continuous time (Cont. T)
Place: One place (1P)/two or more places (2 or more P)

Figure 7. Relation between spaces.

Table 1. Event [Time – Space (Place)] Unit combinations.

Type	Event (E)	Time (T)	Place (P)	Space (S)	Event [Time-Space(Place)] Unit
A1	1 E	1 pt. of T	1P	1S	E1[T1-S1 (P1)]
A2	1 E	1 pt. of T	2 or more P	2 or more S	E1 [T1-S1, S2…Sn (P1, P2…Pn)]
B1	2 or more E	1 pt. of T	2 or more P	2 or more S	E1, E2…En [T1–S1, S2…Sn (P1, P2…Pn)]
B2	2 or more E	Cont. T	2 or more P	2 or more S	E1, E2…En [T1, T2 …Tn–S1, S2, Sn (P1)]
B3	2 or more E	Cont. T	2 or more P	2 or more S	E1, E2…En [T1,T2…Tn- S1,S2…Sn (P1,P2…Pn)]

Space: One space (1S)/two or more spaces (2 or more S)

E1 [T1–S1(P1)] – is a basic Iconographic Unit that an SVN is composed of. It is our belief that the designer creates an Event [Time-Space] unit using Place as the metaphor. It is this iconographic unit that allows viewers to orient themselves to the 'narrative time' of the story. But an iconographic unit without actors is meaningless. It is the actors within the iconographic unit who are the real indicators of the temporal progression of the story. Using this as the basic formula we find techniques of representing story- time on a static medium.

4. TECHNIQUES OF REPRESENTING A STORY IN RELATION TO EVENT [TIME-SPACE (PLACE)] UNIT

Having identified the components of the Iconographic Unit in an SVN, we shall now examine examples of SVN. In doing so we shall test the space-place co-relation and investigate the technique designers have used to represent a story in a static medium. We shall base our observations on the number of events that are being communicated.

4.1. One Event

A1) One Event - One point of Time (One Place)

The most commonly used technique; a single, easily identifiable event from the story is introduced to us. This technique corresponds to the photograph, where a single instant is captured. An example of this instance can be viewed in the Kailashnath temple complex (Figure 8). The event is frozen at an instant as it happens at a specific place (in this case Mount Kailasa) which is portrayed by the representational space.

A2) One Event - One point of Time (Different Places)

Sometimes an event unfolds at different locations concurrently. These places may be connected to each other, for e.g. rooms in a house; or disconnected, for. e.g. two houses in two different cities. An excellent example of this technique — Figure 9 shows the event — 'the giving out of worldly possessions by Sita, Rama and Lakshamana before they enter the forest'. This single event unfolds at two different places i.e. A) in front of Sita's chamber, and B) the chamber of Rama & Lakshamana. The two places are represented by two spaces within the composition.

4.2. Two or More Events

B1) Two Events - One point of Time (Two Places)

In a story, it is quite possible for events to unfold concurrently at different places. The designer presents us with happenings to the various characters involved in the story at a particular point of time, as they

Table 2. Iconographic Unit.

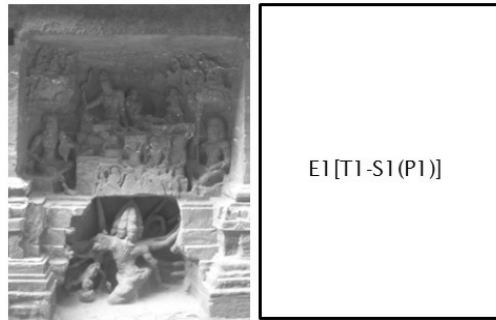| Unit No.	Event (E)	Time (T)	Space (S)	Place (P)
1	1- Ravana shaking Mt. Kailasa	1	1	1- Mt. Kailasa

Figure 8. An SVN depicting one event, unfolding at one moment of time.
Source: Photograph by author.

Figure 9. An SVN an event unfolding at two places at the same time.
Source: Redrawn from the Ramayana, Plate 18, Add. MS 15296(1), f.46a, British Library.

Table 3. Iconographic Unit.

Unit No.	Event (E)	Time (T)	Space (S)	Place (P)
1	1- Sita, Rama & Lakshamana give away their material possessions		1	1- Sita's home
2		1	2	2- Prince's home

experience it in different locations. In Figure 10, event 1, Krishna awaiting Radha in the forest, and event 2) messenger from Krishna speaking to Radha. The image is divided into two registers i.e two spaces. At one point of time we are presented with two events happening at two different locations, represented as two iconographic units.

B2) Two Events - Continuous Time (One Place)

Events in a story can unfold in the same place, at different times. The designer resolves this problem by representing the two iUnits conceptually within the same place but arranging them at different spaces. In Figure 11, two events progress in time, but unfurl at the very same spot i.e. the king's chamber. Juxtaposed, the viewers have to imagine both the events unfolding in the same place but are temporally apart. The events depicted are 1) The minister Sumatra begs queen Keikeyi to reconsider her decision. 2) Rama, Lakshamana and Sita bid farewell. The text which accompanies this visual tells us, that the incidents are successive; this helps us draw the order of occurrence. The location of both events is the King's chamber, signified by the King's throne. The two events involve almost the same set of characters. Even though the throne occupies different spaces; it does not actually move. Due to constrains of the medium the only way progression of time can be shown is by moving the whole cast of actors along with props to a different space. Usually while viewing SVNs the temporal movement is

Figure 10. Two events unfolding at the same time at two places.
Source: Drawing based on image, pp 88., B.N. Goswamy, Essence of Indian Art, 1986.

Table 4. Iconographic Unit.

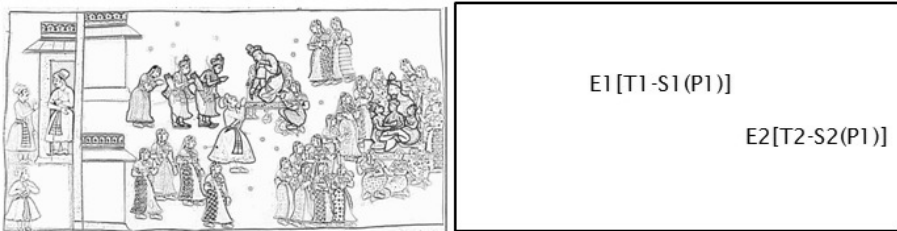| Unit No.	Event (E)	Time (T)	Space (S)	Place (P)
1	1- Krishna waiting for Radha		1	1- forest
2	2- Messenger talking to Radha	1	2	2- Radha's home

Figure 11. Two events unfolding at different times but occur at the same place. Source: Redrawn from The Ramayana, Plate 19, Add. MS 15296(1), f.50a, British Library.

Table 5. Iconographic Unit.

Unit No.	Event (E)	Time (T)	Space (S)	Place (P)
1	1- Minister Sumatra begs Keikeyi	1	1	1- king's chamber
2	2- King bids his children farewell	2	2	

determined by following the Event[Time-Space (Place)] unit. In this case however, movement is only in time and space, not in the place or location of the event.

B3) Two Events - Continuous Time (Different Places)

A series of events occurring at different times and different places that occupy different spaces is the most common way of representing a story. Figure 12 is one such example where we see the iconographic unit moving from one place to another. There is a progression of story time as well as a movement in the location where it occurs. There are three distinct units of Time-Space involved and they take place at three separate places. The architectural setting doubles up as dividers distinguishing the Time-Space units.
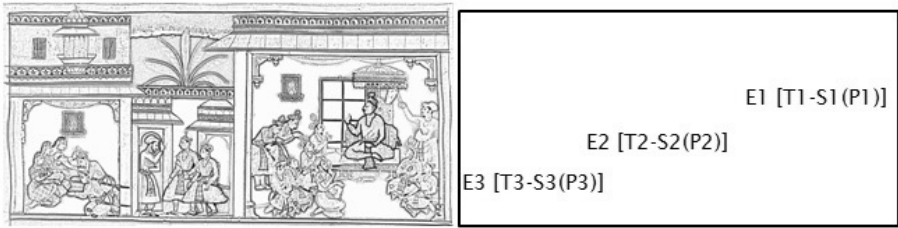
Figure 12. Three events unfold at different times, places and spaces.
Source: Redrawn from the Ramayana, Plate 13, Add. MS 15296(1), f.2a, British Library.

Table 6. Iconographic Unit.

Unit No.	Event (E)	Time (T)	Space (S)	Place (P)
1	1- Princes take leave	1	1	1- king's chamber
2	2- Princes go to queen's chamber	2	2	2- passageway
3	3-Princes take leave of queens	3	3	3-queen's chamber

5. CONCLUSION

Keeping in mind the objective, the methodology followed was 1) Study concepts required to comprehend temporality - Event, Time, Place and Space. 2) Investigate two dimensional graphic representation possibilities for each of the concepts. 3) Draw up a table showing the combinations possible to represent an event or events. 4) Examine SVNs to verify our findings. These examples were analyzed with respect of Iconographic Unit i.e. Event [Time-Space (Place)] and the results recorded in a tabular form. This allows for comparison between our table of combinations and each specific SVN.

Our study shows that given a story the designer has two options – A) select a single event or B) a set of events. If the designer makes the choice to employ the single event option then; depending on the story; (A1) a single event can unfold at a certain place and occupies a certain space (Figure 8), or (A2)may unfolds at two places concurrently (Figure 9). To depict this; the compositional space is divided either explicitly or implicitly into two spaces to signify the location of the action. If on the other hand the designer chooses to go with option two, then depending on the story, there could be three possibilities. B1) Two events unfold at the same time at different places, represented as different spaces (Figure 10). B2) Two events may unfold at different times, at the same place but each event occupies a different space. Due to the limitation of the medium, two events that are separated in time but unfold at the same location cannot be represented at the same space in an SVN (Figure 11). It is only in Dynamic Visual Narratives (DVNs) such as movies it is possible to do this. B3) Two or more events unfold at different times, at different places and occupy different spaces (Figure 12).

It emerges from this study that representational Space in an SVN has a dual function. It not only provides information about the temporal status of the SVN but also holds information regarding the location of the action. In most of the examples (based on the observations drawn from the Iconographic Unit traced for each) we have seen the place-space correlation in SVNs is very high. This strengthens our presupposition that the designer does indeed use the Place or location where the action unfolds as a guide to arrange the compositional Space. Having reached this conclusion, further studies can now be taken up to examine the Place – Space interaction in SVNs.

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