

Chris Chris TV

Introduction

My senior thesis is entitled Chris Chris TV, and it's essentially a television with me on every channel. Through the use of video performance and graphic design, I created my own televised experience by simulating different videos as "channels", and creating logos for each channel. I explored networks that are broadcast on television today and subsequently created my own versions.

Initially, my thesis project started off as two projects in one, a YouTube comedy series and a logo design series. I chose to do a YouTube comedy series because my major is Interarts Performance, which is a joint degree between the Stamps School of Art & Design and the School of Theatre & Drama. That being said, I have a passion for not only performing (primarily acting), but also graphic design. I wanted to highlight these skills for my thesis project by doing a filmic comedy series and a logo design series. My previous project provides a lot of context for the development of Chris Chris TV, because Chris Chris TV is a merged product of the two. Previously, I created a visual journal in which I sketched a logo design every day summing up how the day went, which I would later vectorize (convert the sketch to a digital drawing) on Adobe Illustrator. I would then choose from one of these designs and create a YouTube video for it.

Within Chris Chris TV, I created my own TV channels such as the religion channel, the news channel, my own soap opera channel, commercials, the music channel, etc. Within these different channels, I will have a separate audience to cater to. Chris Chris TV is not limited to one mode of expression: it contains my critique of certain TV

Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

channels, and my personal interpretation of channels: channels I admire, parodies, and even channels I don't like.

Contextual Discussion

One major precedent for Chris Chris TV is satire. There are many different forms of satire: "A feature of satire is strong irony or sarcasm—'in satire, irony is militant'—but parody, burlesque, exaggeration, juxtaposition, comparison, analogy, and double entendre are all frequently used (Claridge, Frye)" For Chris Chris TV I plan to explore some of these rhetorical strategies, such as parody, exaggeration, and even irony. Another category that is often compared with satire is humor. Not all satirical pieces have to be funny, but it's true that Chris Chris TV is essentially comedic.

Works of satire have been present in different mediums for centuries. For example, Molière, a playwright from the 1600s, was known for his satirical approach in his plays: "Molière (Jean Baptiste Poquelin, 1622-1673) was an undistinguished player of tragedy until he discovered his gift for writing stage satire and was launched by his audience into huge success" (Charney). Last semester, Fall 2014, I took an acting class called "Intro to Comedy," and Moliere was one of the authors we did scenes from among many other playwrights. The scene I did was from *Tartuffe* and humor was definitely present in his satirical approach. In regard to satire in Chris Chris TV, I made it in present in my weather channel called "Climate". Within the weather channel, I discuss Michigan weather. In the discussion, I'm basically exaggerating how cold it gets in Michigan during the winter, by comparing our temperatures to Antarctica, making references to the

Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

polar vortex, and labeling the warm temperatures in Michigan as anything below zero-degrees. Satire is also present in media now, especially in sketch comedy aired on TV.

Overall, I see Chris Chris TV heavily using the concept of sketch comedy: "A sketch is really just a short play, usually ten minutes or less. Sketch comedy has its roots in vaudeville and burlesque. A small group of comedians would perform the same sketch over and over again from town to town... These sketches were usually written to show off a performer's talents" (Bent). Over the years, sketch comedy has changed and made its way to other mediums, such as TV:

"Contemporary sketch comedy has its origins in 1950s comedy shows such as Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*, and from the Chicago's Second City comedy theater, which blends improvisation with sketch. It was popularized with NBC's *Saturday Night Live* in the 1970s and is enjoying new found popularity on Television and the internet today" (Bent).

As you can see, sketch comedy is also a major precedent in my thesis, but more so the sketch comedy shows that I grew up watching in the 1990s (thanks to my mother) and of course sketch comedy from my generation. This includes black performers who appeared on sketch comedy shows, for example, *In Living Color*, which ran from 1990-1994. *In Living Color* is a sketch show structurally similar to *Saturday Night Live*, but it is "Afro-American focused" ("In Living Color"). *In Living Color* features comedians such as Jamie Foxx, The Wayans Brothers, Jim Carrey, and T'Keyah Keymáh. Jamie Foxx is also a comedian outside of the show and later received his own show in 1996, *The Jamie Foxx*

Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

Show. Jamie Foxx was known for playing multiple characters in his show: frequently during the sitcom, the TV would come on and Foxx would appear as the newscaster presenting the weather, as well as the person watching the TV. I plan to do something similar when I present my news TV channel, not because Jamie Foxx did, but it's a precedent to what I'm doing. Not all black performers were only in sketch shows, but many performers had their own TV sitcoms, like Martin Lawrence. His show was called *Martin*. *Martin* premiered in 1992 and ran until 1997. Like Jamie Foxx, Lawrence also played multiple characters in his sitcom. Foxx and Lawrence even had their own female characters played, by. Some of these performers didn't have their big break on TV, though most of them started off doing some other form of comedy, like stand-up.

There were many different black performers who were competing against each other when it came to comedy, and the ones who were successful were those who brought something different to the table: "Stand-up comedy is like the internet. A lot of people are doing it, but not a lot of people know what to do" (Littleton). Chris Chris TV is not just an ordinary, online, social media video series. I have different channels contextualized by the TV as a whole, and these channels are displayed through a streaming device to mimic the way we use TV. Essentially, it's a physical piece instead of solely being an online thing.

When I was originally producing a YouTube comedy series, YouTube stars such as Tre Melvin and Darmirra Brunson inspired me. Tre Melvin is a YouTube star whose quantitative/qualitative videos I admire, even though they have a homemade-feel to them. On the other hand, Darmirra Brunson, who is a YouTube star, is known for her celebrity parody videos, but she also has videos where she creates her own characters. Darmirra

Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

even landed a role on a sitcom by Tyler Perry on Oprah's TV network, called *Love Thy Neighbor*. Within Chris Chris TV, I plan to incorporate both what has been presented already, and also what's currently available to my generation. Of course, I will also contribute my own ideas.

Creative Work

With Chris Chris TV, my method is far more efficient than what I was doing before. Previously, I'd sketch my logos, illustrate them, and then choose one to make a video. Currently, all that is condensed. I can now focus on the logos that I will use for my videos and therefore have the ability to be more detailed with each one. When it comes to the videos, I'm mimicking the structure of a TV. I'm creating my own channels, which will be the videos. I will have a broad range of channels; I won't be talking about one specific topic. I can do things all the way from the "History" channel all the way to a Shopping Network if I so choose.

When it comes to video work, the script is what differentiates one's material from other artists. The video editing, the compositions of the shots, the sound, all come into play as well because they can distract from or support the main content, the script.

When it comes to the actual recording of the videos, I'm heavily using a green screen. The green allows me to not be limited to one space; I can choose any background I want, therefore giving me wide latitude in fulfilling my video concepts. Once I have my videos, I will start generating logo designs for each channel. This is very similar to how most TV networks or even TV shows have their own logo, usually displayed in the beginning of the show or in the bottom-right corner. I'm also planning to use the

Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

transitional elements of a TV, such as when the viewer changes channel. Ideally, every channel will feature me; I'm doing all the writing, the acting, the recording, the editing, and the creating.

I have 14 videos for my channels. Here's my logo for Chris Chris TV itself and some snapshots of the videos:



Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

In conclusion, Chris Chris TV is exactly what it sounds like, my own TV. Through the use of film acting and graphic design, I accomplished creating my own channels for different audiences, and mimicking the function of a TV. The different channels that are displayed on TV today all have different audiences and concepts, which served as my inspiration and frame for Chris Chris TV. Using what other performers have presented both in the past and currently, I used those precedents and resources as a jumping off point, and finally created my own unique channels. Chris Chris TV was displayed in the form of a trailer for our exhibit screening, and is now mounted in the Slusser gallery until May 4th, 2015 and is on the Internet for people to watch:

www.chrisjustchris.com/chrischristv



Chris Ford
04/23/2015
Chris Chris TV's Thesis Paper

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