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Integrative Project Section 003
Senior Thesis Paper

Transitioning Through Layers

Introduction:

As an artist, I face the frustrations of attempting to achieve new levels of originality in a mass produced society obsessed with rapidly consuming information. Battling this struggle, I decided to create an integrative project which confronts my fears of what controls my mind by using specifically chosen borrowed or found video overlaid with my original clips.

The duration of the video is 14:07, and projects my perception and fears of what has controlled my thoughts and mind over the years. I use original shots integrated with elements ranging from 1950s-present consumerism commercials, to Disney films, dubstep samples, esoteric poetry, and philosophical lectures. I acquired the elements of my video through family, friends, classmates, and strangers. Thus, the work holds layers of personal meaning and derives from what I perceive as important throughout my interpersonal development.

The Goal: Emotional Response

Embarking on my senior year, I knew I wanted to produce something that challenged me and evoked emotion. I specifically sought songs that conveyed my feelings in regards to what controls my mind and my perceptions. Unexperienced with creating a lengthy video, but knowing I wanted to produce a "mixtape video", I started with so many concepts and ideas while becoming lost in my roles as creative director, videographer, photographer, costume designer, makeup artist, business coordinator, talent, and production assistant. Through production of this video, I face my insanity in a literal sense through fast-paced video to abstractly depict the cluttered, rapidly changing duality of my fears and hopes as to what controls my mind.

Creative Work:

Process:

Development through Experiments:

My master video is created to loop so the beginning and end are connected to smoothly transition in darkness according to the audio.

The production started with exploring costume and how our decision in presenting ourselves is related to our cultural influence, time period, and biology.

Using my Canon 70D DSLR and a roll of green screen I created a stop motion using clothing and other 'identity' props from my past to present. I used these stop motions to build into songs, whose mood and lyrics aligned with my initial interests in daily costume. In other words, how we decide to present our physical & abstract personas through visual identity



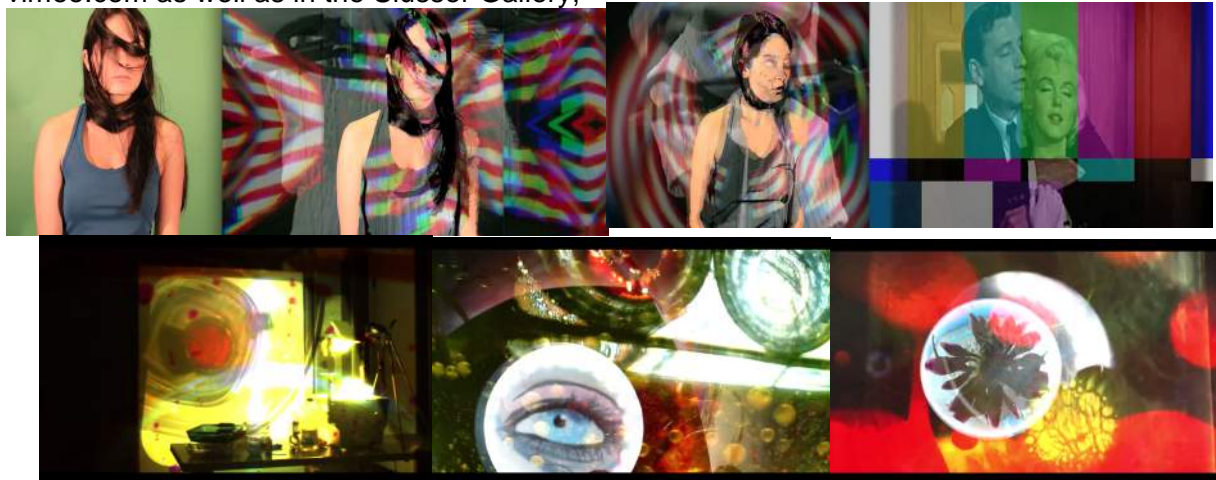
Musical Flow and Imagery:

In my *Intro to Modern Dance* class last winter, our instructor introduced music with movements midway through and focused the first half of the semester on music's power to naturally control one's rhythm. According to Mannes, author of *The Power of Music*, "Music stimulates more parts of the brain than any other human function". Therefore, I started collecting and producing materials, such as found or original video, whose imagery matched my concepts while simultaneously choosing music and sound materials to play in a sequence for an overall video. I let the music, which was specifically chosen according to my original concepts, choose and move some of my imagery. Thus, allowing me to insert my perception with my chosen imagery while leaving room for the viewer to develop their own.

I use "heavy" editing to communicate my stream of thought and recreate the fluxing overload of information. I slowly taught myself how to layer audio clips and realized the importance of audio adjustment in context with how sensitive and powerful hearing is.

I use a remixed version of "Addicted To Love" that inspired my stop motion that has images from my summer spent in New York interspersed with Marilyn Monroe, the classic icon of sex, pleasure, and beauty. By interlaying my own personal accounts of love & sex with that of an icon provokes feelings of interdependence with culture in time.

This is one of seven videos in which I let the audio inspire the correct imagery to capture my flowing thoughts. Each video on its own represents a clarity of thought which becomes muddled as my mind races, unable to keep up with the insanity. Therefore, I ended up creating sequences of thoughts, the independent videos with their own imagery and concepts, which over several months transformed into smaller fluxes in my master video, which is displayed on vimeo.com as well as in the Slusser Gallery,



Contextual Discussion

The Layers:

Opening: The History of Everything

Due to the infatuation with the instinctual curiosity of our origins, combined with the inevitable unknown premises of life, I chose Jenny Howell's poem "A Brief History of Everything, Including You" to convey a rudimentary obsession.

At 0:19, Howell's voice recites the first three minutes of her poem but, unlike the original the voice is distorted to give the "creation story" a darker tone. Imagery of morphed, lava-like patterns and light textures fill the screen as the words convey the creation of the universe via god, or gods, or nothing, followed by the expanse of space and all of the elements and other matter necessary for life.

As the poem transitions at 1:10 into human thoughts and perceptions, borrowed black and white film makes its appearance, adding depth to the progression and evolution of humanity. The lava forms give way for these new, yet original styles of technicolor film, but consistently flow to the end of recitation. As the poem unfolds to cover a range of beautiful and horrific emotions of the human condition and experience, my imagery matches the words based on my perception of meeting the time, technology, and possible history of its existence.



Keys and Symbolism:

As an artist, I prefer isolation with my thoughts. At 3:33 I express the potential impact this has by sporadically using NASA clips that relay the effect of isolation on the central nervous system.

The imagery I use in the beginning, particularly this first three minutes of Howell's poem and the NASA clips of the nervous system and color wheel, is found throughout the piece as it becomes a symbol when transitioning into my different layers of what controls my mind.



The video transitions into previous songs using audio and visual clips from a 1950s documentary on effective communication, which seems to compete for attention through volume as the imagery mixes with new meanings. Clips from Prelinger Archives, such as a CBS broadcast announcement stating that "You Are There", are also used to build up and transition the multiple songs.

Thus, each section reveals a different layer of my perception, influenced by my surroundings but fundamentally based in the duality of fear and hope. I repeat imagery to familiarize the viewer with it and allow them to recognize it enough to create their own interpretation thereof. This reiteration of my images enforces the importance of perception but seeks to further explore if there is any commonality in the fundamental base behind perceptions.

Duality Realization:

By carefully selecting and arranging tracks in a mix, an artistic statement can be created that is greater than the sum of the individual songs alone. Captain Murphy, also known as the music producer/rapper Flying Lotus, created a music video to accompany the release of his mixtape *"Duality"*. *"Duality"* takes the viewer through the steps of "how to become an occult leader" with lessons on how to control the minds of others, using sex and drugs as tools, and other satirical, dark lessons. Each lesson is the start or transition into a new song as well as varying editing style in video. Primarily the video clips consist of "found" or "borrowed" clips, which have an older technicolor quality of the 20th century, particularly 60s-90s. Several clips show cultural images of occult leaders, popular television and movies, and are typically disturbing or provocative. I am inspired by the ability of the artists to strike a balance between the overall dark concept and humor formed by using past clips in a contradicting manner.



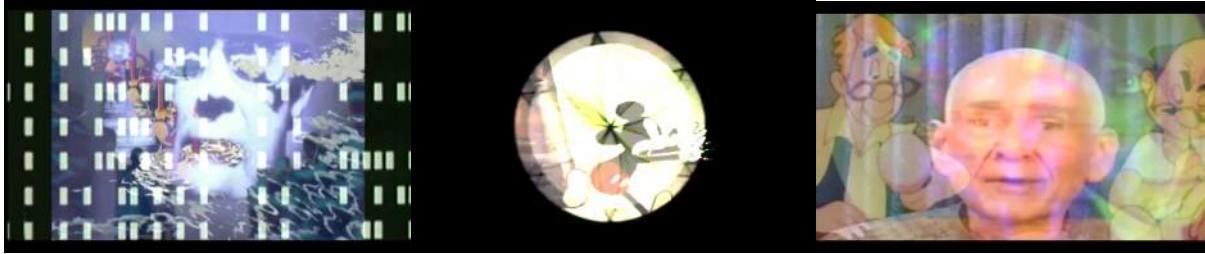
As stated previously, The color wheel is used throughout the video as an element for announcing a song or thought transition. Thus, the first song after the opening poem and audio explanation is red.

My Fears:

Others' willingness to accept information without question is a flaw and concern I worry about due to recent historical events, particularly "new age cults". For that matter, I worry about any group seeking to strictly control and threaten the humanity of an individual by forcing an incomprehensible choice. This fear is conveyed through the continued use of marionette or puppet clips as well as with the real footage from lectures of "Heaven's Gate" cult leader, Marshall Applewhite.

Being apart of the 90s generation, I remember "Apple computers" and "Macintosh" associated with technology and advancement, which have become fearful words over the years with the rapid progression of readily available tools as they constantly demand new updates and learning curves.

Apple's first commercial, airing during the Super Bowl in 1984, alludes to how their tools will help society avoid George Orwell's dystopia "1984", which was inspired by Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" (my favorite book). Taking this commercial, I used portions of it to establish my time period and challenge my fear by directly re-adjusting it. Another way I directly manipulate my fears is through the use of "Mickey Mouse" cartoons, due to vivid childhood memories of the films as well as recent nightmares where the rodent taunted my "reality".



Since the color wheel is a framework for transitioning into the different moods and thoughts of the video, it is also used to show how these basic concepts can become overwhelming. As the video becomes progressively more chaotic, the color wheel is used as a guide through this insanity but also corresponds with pandemonium.

Brave New Doctor Parnassus: Comfort Until The End

The juxtaposition of dialogues at 6:55 reveals the questionable easiness of death and the price of comfort. This particular dialogue represents my own interpretation of spiritual warfare, which I believe resides naturally in all of mankind as a small voice making decisions.

Overlapping critical scenes from “*The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*” and BBC’s “*Brave New World*” added ambiguity to the speaker, which is actually Mustapha Mond the Controller in Huxley’s dystopia. “*Brave New World*” presents a perfectly controlled and ordered world, in which the conditioned citizens understand their control over their ending and therefore do not fear death.

Likewise in “*The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*”, Tony the salesman, played originally by Heath Ledger and replaced by Johnny Depp, convinces a rich woman to give up her soul by choosing a more righteous path of an immortalized death. This particular scene holds much meaning within the contexts of the storylines of both movies as well as in real history. The small boats that flash show images of timeless deceased, icons, such as Princess Diana, whose death I remember first understanding at six years old and whose death site I saw in the tunnel in Paris over the summer.



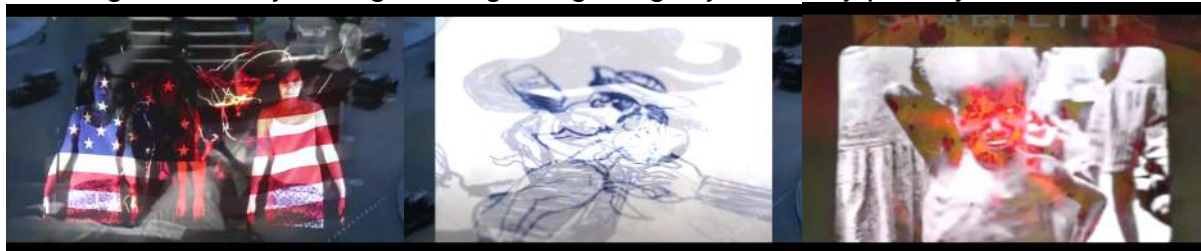
No Colors Anymore: The Dangers of Comfort and Order

With a monotone voice to match the traffic light and newspaper collages, at 8:52, the dialogues slip once again into the 1953 “Communications” documentary. This dialogue unfolding under the many layers is a mirrored clip of an anatomical Styrofoam head, onto which I projected my first video collage remixed using found footage. This particular video was not only an essential starting point for becoming more experienced in video editing and finding my own style, but also is a cornerstone for this project’s progression. Ironically the video is entitled, “No Colors Anymore” and uses imagery of a dying albatross and old biology documentaries on light and color to create abstract cellular collages that transition between original films and HD, real world video. Droning on, “...One or none.”

Next, by layering the information onto itself, it exaggerates its points for communicating stronger by redundancy and increasing the volume. This portion of the video exemplifies my fears of the logical, left-brained point of view containing and underappreciating beauty.

Meaning in Reality:

Though hardly legible due to the many layers of light, pictures of my grandfather's 1964 Navy journal appear, giving a reason a day why he hated being in the service. Having never met my grandfather, whose death is associated with my initial understanding of the word "death", this hand-written and drawn account is a special and personal link into my past. Almost divinely, some of his written words matched up with the video imagery and concepts I had been developing. For example, reason 53. "Can't sleep cuz the ship is rolling in", directly linking the beginning songs' lyrics to my past by coincidence.



At 11:08, the stop motion of my cultural influences comes back, but it shows multiples of myself and is actually my shorter video "The Puppet Master" projected onto an American flag to reference the beginning.

From beneath the red lava, where clips from "A History of Everything" at the beginning are replayed, Mustapha Mond replies, "Yes, even the right to fall in love and then be spurred, betrayed, left racked with pain and jealousy. Is all of that really what you want Mr. Savage?" The Savage confirms that he accepts and claims them all as the most dynamic and complicated editing flashes while the music builds the compacted, intricately layered videos for the imagery, and hopefully the viewer will succumb to awe momentarily.

Nothingness: The Beginning, The End, and The Temptation

For the last three minutes of my video, I purposefully left parts completely black in an attempt to express nothingness and to hopefully evoke a reaction from the viewer.

Though this was an intentional decision, some viewers within the gallery space were confused and thought the equipment was ruined for the last two minutes of video featuring Alan Watts' lectures layered over warring music. Thus, for the final video version I uploaded for home viewing on Vimeo.com, I added clips featuring my initial light experiments with a digital camera, when I started collecting my own database. Mostly these clips feature my fascination with the new equipment in attempting to capture a particular perception of my reality.

As the color wheel completes once again and disappears, giving way to a mysterious series of these experiments, the lighthearted music is defeated as the imagery is taken over by the reflection of a face overlaid with a candle and tribal drums beat, with a snake hissing. Symbolising the temptation of knowledge from my Christian background and the symbolism of the pagan ouroboros, the snake hisses as the candle is blown out. Before there can be blackness, the blurry ember encompasses the screen and the

words from the beginning are repeated backwards into blackness, ready to loop once again.



Influences and Wavelengths:

Seeing a multi-colored jpeg overlaid with a strange cellular-like structure on Ann Arbor Film Festival's website, I clicked on the link, which lead me to the real life screening of Joseph Bernard's video collages. I read reviews of Bernard's work, developed over the past several decades using 8mm film. and was intrigued by the description of his artistic perspective as "an experimental filmmaker". I was impressed with Bernard's projections that I saw at the Michigan Theatre. His projections had rapidly moving patterns and textures and materials intersected with home movie clips and light experiments. His editing style, imagery and thoughts were a near mirror image of mine and the reaction his videos evoked are the emotions I aspire to evoke as well.

Conclusion:

History, Meaning, and Perception:

In the future I want to project installations with optional or minimal sound to direct more focus on the intricacies of my videos and to further explore how life presents us with choices, but never a definite purpose. I have contemplated the idea of reversing or slowing the video in another gallery setting to "freeze" the layers and allow the audience freedom to follow my videos at their own pace, on their own islands.

My integrative project uses older films and clips established before "I" was even thought of as a person in history. This connects me to a past of creative thinkers, both artists and designers, and all creators, who have directly influenced the technology and possibilities I have as an artist today. In a way, my work is an ode to that which prevailed before it and gave it life, though it may cease to exist in its original context. Though history repeats itself, our destiny, with this great nothingness from which we came and will go back into, looms over the entire moment of the piece as it begins, ends, grows, dies, and transitions through layers.

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