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Integrative Project Written Thesis

**Creature Feature**

## ***Introduction***

The guiding questions for this artwork have changed several times throughout its execution. This essay will narrate the trajectory of these ideological changes and how they influenced subsequent questions and methodologies.

This artwork explores ways we cling to an internal identity to maintain a feeling of certainty in a world constantly changing outside our control. More specifically this artwork is about a character called the Creature who represents a toxic self created through fear and grown from patterns of mental and behavior neglect. This figure is essentially a large puppet, sculpture, and costume that is controlled and animated from within by a performer. We are all capable of becoming the Creature. The Creature's perspective, reflections, and moment of change are chronicled in my short film *Creature Feature*. This film is the main summation of this conceptual exploration. It also suggests ways this Creature's outlook relates to larger social problems of toxicity inherent in the socialization of masculinity, though that's only peripheral to this project.

This essay will be structured with contextual placement elaborating on artists and social circumstances braided with my methods of inquiry, subsequently leading to the next motivating question, which leads to another contextual placement. Finally the essay will list and unpack the finished artworks resulted from this project, followed by a conclusion reflecting on the changing trajectory of driving questions and resulting final outcome of this exploration.

## ***1<sup>st</sup> Methodology***

I knew I wanted to create this Creature to embody the traits of a harmfully toxic and unsustainably unfulfilled character. I perceived this character as being somewhat ubiquitous in society, that of the person who has landed themselves in an unfulfilling, potentially toxic life. And so I had the strong urge to snap people out of their patterns using shock and surprise to cause a rethinking of their beliefs and expectations in life, first by having them rethink the present moment in which I intervene. Though there were still questions of how best to activate these personality traits for the viewer. The original plan was to stage public interventions, using the Creature to distract and confuse people. I'm operating on the assumption that people don't expect something different to happen to them while moving through work and life routines.

## ***1<sup>st</sup> Contextual Information***

I was inspired to use the Creature as a means of intervention and utilizing chaotic potential of public life by *Let's Paint TV*. Performance artist John Kilduff had a public access TV show in Los Angeles in the early 2000s. His show *Let's Paint TV* is most notable for its live episodes in which John runs on a treadmill while painting pictures, blending fruit smoothies, and answering the calls of anonymous viewers at the same time. This process is somewhat overwhelming for John as he tries to multitask while fending off rude callers. The anonymous callers are very distracting as John tries to train his focus on several tasks and the conversation at once. I'm very inspired by the way this combining of goals and circumstances creates a situation in which forces of the world and other people collide to create an wholly new and unpredictable experience.

To practice and experiment with this idea I took the Creature to a house party and rock show at Luther Cooperative House. From there I tried to surprise and interrogate people with the

intended result of changing their experience of the party to one of shock, novelty, and spectacle. I feel this was successful to an extent because partygoers were definitely surprised and confused. But this approach wasn't able to inscribe the depths of the Creature's perspective on the world, its thoughts and feelings were overlooked by the sheer spectacle of its presence.



Documentation turned promo image from the Creature's *House Party Intervention*

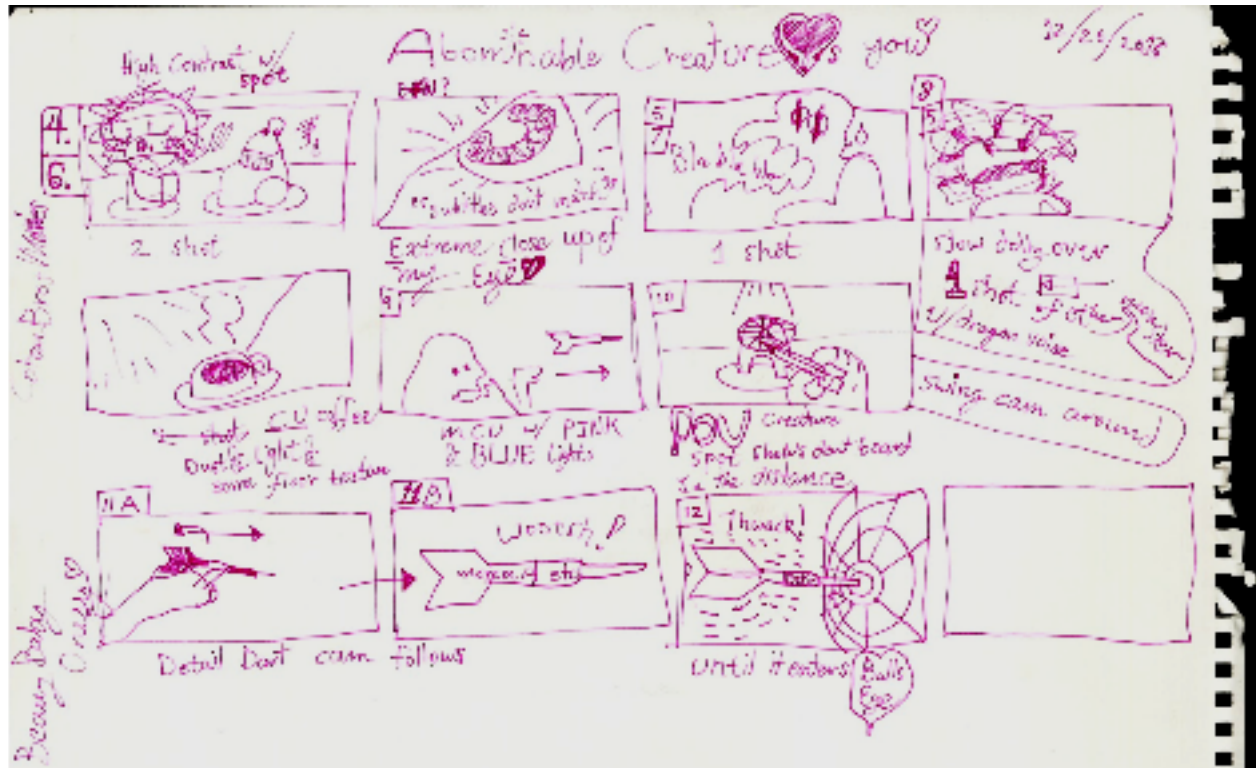
### ***Reflection & Shifting Contextual Information***

Because this style of intervention did not achieve the results I wanted, and because the Creatures underlying characteristics were difficult to present and unpack in the spontaneous live events that happened, I decided that these ideas needed to be unraveled through a different approach. This is how I decided to create a somewhat traditionally produced narrative film with the help of the Duderstadt video studio. By having a semi-scripted short film I could more deliberately articulate the changing events, thoughts, and feelings of the Creature.

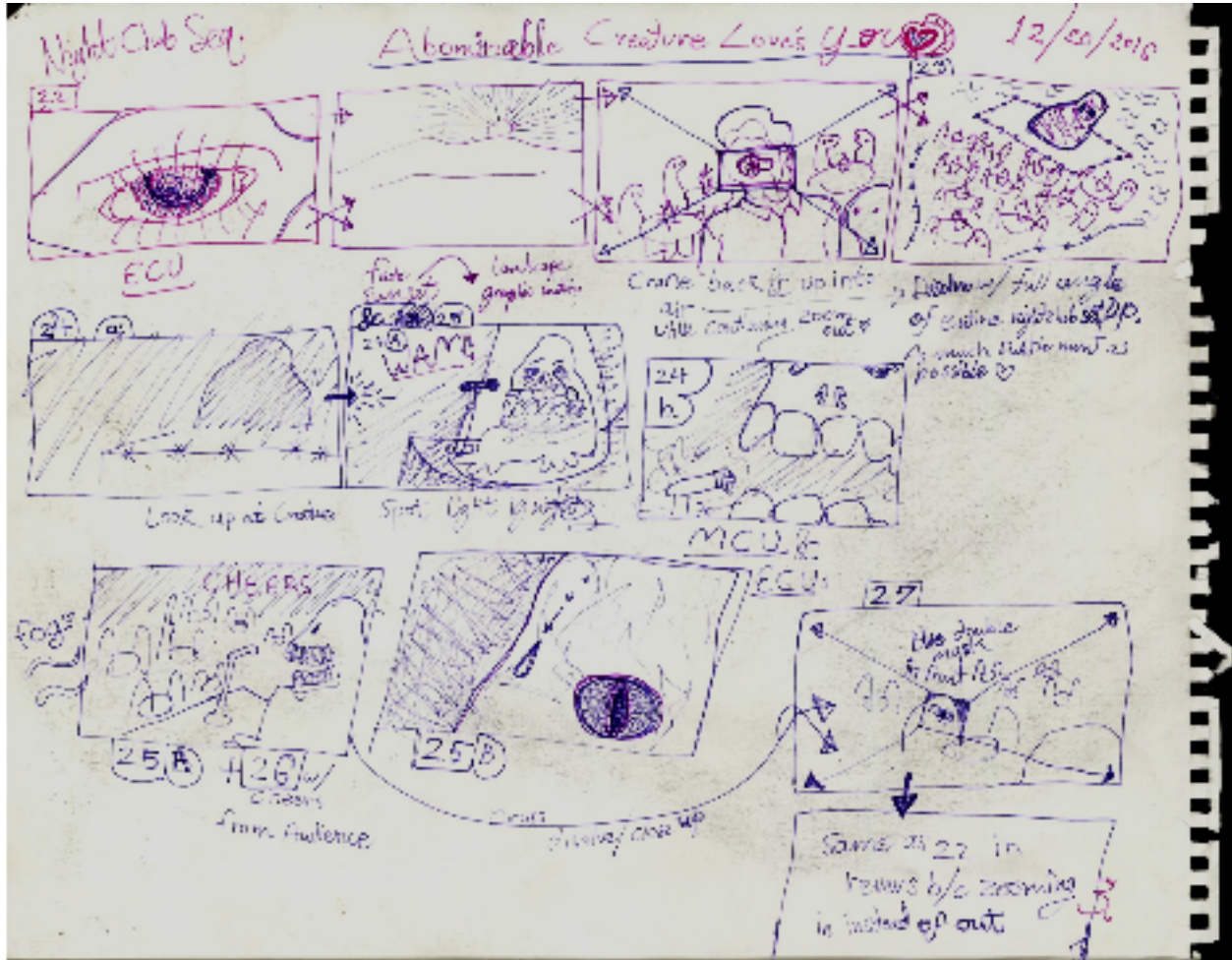
The work of Laurie Anderson inspired and informed *Creature Feature*. Often Anderson will utilize a voice changer which she calls her "voice of authority" this was the impetus for my choice to also use a voice changer and amplifier, functioning as a formal tie to representation of social toxicity in general, and a nod to the toxicity of masculinity in American culture. Additionally, I'm inspired by the way Laurie Anderson's writings and performances engage the stage in a way that is less focused on her exhibiting her talents and writings, and instead the stage becomes a place where the events of life can play out for all of us, the viewer and the audience, to participate, reflect,

and interpret. I was trying to make my films events play out in a similar way, leaving much of the setting as a black void, in which the viewer can allow their mind to speculate and expand.

### Storyboard



Creature Feature storyboard, page 1



Creature Feature storyboard, page 3

**Creative Work**

There are several sequences in this film, however most of the exposition unfolds through an interlacing between two main scenes. The first scene takes place in the present, in which the Creature and the grey soft sculpture Blobi are talking over coffee in the format of a therapy session. This is significant because it places emphasis equally on what happens when the Creature performs stand up comedy as well as unpacking what the creature thinks and feels as these events unfold.



Also notable in is the climax and ending of the film, which is when the Creature realizes that it must change its ways, faces it's fears of the unknown, and takes a risky leap of faith towards a new identity. After the Creature tells Blobi the entire story so far this moment is illustrated when

Blobi asks “Where are you now?” and the Creature admits to itself, “I’m on the edge of a cliff, and if I don’t hit the bullseye....” then turns and throws a dart at a distant dartboard on the other end of this metaphysical dimension. This moment is especially poignant because it indicates and feels risky and scary to be taking a proverbial leap into the unknown, or taking “a shot in the dark”.

The Creature was also placed in the Argus Building II Stamps BFA exhibition. While there I was activating the creature from within the entire opening night. When audience members approached the Creature would antagonize them while speaking through a microphone leading to a distorted guitar amp hidden under the stage. The same dart board from the *Creature Feature* short film was also in the Gallery space hung on the wall perpendicular to the Creature. The Creature was on a recreation of the same stage from the comedy night club of the short film. From atop this stage the Creature would invite viewers to throw a dart at the dartboard, the Creature would be talking while they try to concentrate and right when they’re about to throw it the Creature would knock over the round cardboard table the person was standing next to.

The person would almost always miss the dartboard because of the distraction and because it’s difficult to get a bullseye on the first try. The Creature then would freak out, yelling about how that’s its special table and the viewer must please set it back up. There are several meanings in these actions, but primarily the purpose of this challenge is for the viewer to feel they’re in an unfamiliar situation caused by the fact that the Creature was there at all, secondly being put on the spot puts the participant under pressure to perform. When they fail to hit the board the Creature jokes that it must now bite off their arms and legs. This is truly a test of the viewers patience and determination, and emotional resilience in the face of failure. Failure is a key concept beneath it all because we all inevitably encounter failures that cause us to question our identities as competent, whole individuals. And that’s what this dart board was all about, life getting in the way.

### **Conclusion**

The Creature ultimately served as a contemporary cultural archetype for fear and identity crisis in the face of failure. An internal battle we must all face, and the sooner the better or we become like the Creature and will not change until life completely demands it. The *Creature Feature* meaningfully unraveled the emotions and mind of the Creature for the audience, explaining a more potent presence in the art gallery installation. With the main goal of hoping people reevaluate the effectiveness of their lives and the impact on the people in their life, the trail of methodologies slimmed this goal down into one specific inner journey of the Creature which took place on the silver screen. It’s clear through this film that we are all capable of becoming the Creature.