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PROJECTING THE MIND: SURREALIST IDEAS WITH CONTEMPORARY TOOLS

Adam Casey Paul

Intermedia MFA
University of Maine

August 2019

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PROJECTING THE MIND: MANIFESTING STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH VIDEO AND INSTALLATION TECHNIQUES

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Dr. Susan Lynn Smith

This thesis is to fulfill the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Intermedia

August 2019

Abstract

The thesis work was derived from the evolution of an artistic practice following certain inspirations and interest in a specific set of tools. As an artist I was always interested in cinema and the ways in which imagery can affect an audience. When I got into the Intermedia MFA program, I became interested in the Surrealism movement and its desire to move away from traditionally accepted logic and forms. This movement was surrounded by emerging ideas in psychology at the time perpetuated by the “fathers of psychology” William James and Sigmund Freud. Their understandings of stream of consciousness and psychoanalysis of dreams were important to Andre Breton and the Surrealist movement in trying to understand the nature of thought. Having studied these ideas and experimental techniques in video arts I sought to combine these interests into a single project. I always had an interest in stream of consciousness and wondered if there was a way to share it with others. This project sought to determine if a stream of

consciousness could be represented through video installation techniques using space and materials as metaphors and video as a tool for representing “thoughts.” Although the initial piece was successful on some levels, future iterations will be made to address some of the complexity of such an endeavor.

Chapter I: Contextual Review

The Beginning of a Practice

My artistic practice is one that grew out of a necessity to question what I was doing with my life and why. From a young age and throughout my education I was trained to be a mathematical, scientific, and logical person. The end goal seemed to be electrical engineering or something in this vein. However, I found myself growing increasingly bored and jaded by these pursuits. I saw that most of my work followed one possible path to one possible answer.

The only thing that brought me relief were the arts and my dreams. Neither of these things were limited by the structures of logic and taboos of society by which I was feeling shackled and constrained. I remember each night getting ready for bed and looking forward to dreaming. It was a time when I could experience things outside of the expected. I was almost always disappointed when I awoke each day knowing that it would be back to math and exams. This is what drew me to surrealistic art (though I didn't realize this is what it was at the time).

When I got into my undergraduate career, I spent the first year undecided on a major. I assumed of course that it would be engineering but I needed the time to figure out which type was suitable for me. Fortunately, I made some friends my first year who were artistic and creative types. Through my friendship with them I realized that what I wanted in my life was not the pursuit of numbers and I took up New Media and Studio Art. I focused primarily on cinema and the storytelling techniques available in video.

I thought I knew what I was doing artistically by the time I joined up in the Intermedia MFA. However, my time in this program changed my outlook on the arts and

what I do drastically and helped me to realize that I'm just barely starting to get my head around it. In my first formal critique I described some of my work as "Surrealistic" when in fact my attempts to tell stories through my work was quite the opposite. My professor, Nate, challenged my understanding of Surrealism. He tasked me to research Surrealism hoping that clarification would either confirm or deny that this is what I meant. In doing this research, I fell in love with the attitudes of a movement and it opened my eyes to many of the things that my practice could become as well as what it was not required to be. It helped me question my motivations and goals and what the purpose of my work is.

This thesis work is a culmination of the development of a practice which began with its roots in the ideas of the Surrealist movement. In order to understand how the ideas and structures of my work developed, I will describe the mindset of the surrealists and the understanding of psychology available to them in their time. I will also speak briefly on several other ideas introduced to my practice through my classes that greatly influenced my direction and led to the project that became this thesis work. For a more in depth description of the thesis project please refer to chapter III.

The Surrealist Movement and Post-War Irrationalism

The Surrealist movement began in the early 20's in France and was influenced by the Dada movement. Dadaism was centered around a few key ideas. "[as] a direct reaction to the slaughter, propaganda and inanity of World War I" (Oxford Art Online) the Dadaists began to call into the question the ideas of "progress" and what it meant at

the time. They rejected idealism and “they condemned the nationalist and capitalist values that led to the cataclysm of the war and employed unorthodox techniques, performances and provocations to jolt the rest of society into self-awareness.” (Oxford). They believed that the logical and material minds that society had been conditioned to have must be the reason for the failures of society and that a breaking down of this logic was the way to restructure society and move forward.

After World War 1 many of the Dada artists started working in what became the Surrealism Movement. Surrealism was officially coined by Andre Breton’s *Manifestoes of Surrealism* in 1924. “Similar to Dada, Surrealism was characterized by a profound disillusionment with and condemnation of the Western emphasis on logic and reason. However, Breton wanted to create something more programmatic out of Dada’s nonsensical and seemingly unfocused activities” (Oxford Art Online). This is what led the Surrealists to seek purpose in the unconscious mind. They believed that this endeavor could help to understand the nature of thought and that because the unconscious mind was not filtered by logic and reasoning, it was closer to the truth.

In Andre Breton’s *Manifestoes of Surrealism* he describes the idea that the unconscious mind can offer access to “multiple lives worth of perspective” (Breton, p. 3). He describes the way in which society conditions us to think. We are taught certain rules for filtering our thoughts and these rules are what we call “logic.” People belonging to different groups will have different ways of filtering based on their cultural and societal conditioning as well as the experiences of the world unique to them.

Breton solidifies Surrealism as:

“Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (Breton, p. 26).

He then goes on to describe the roles of Surrealism to “examine with a critical eye the notions of reality and unreality, reason and irrationality, reflection and impulse, knowledge and “fatal” ignorance, usefulness and uselessness” (Breton, p. 140).

The surrealists wanted to access the unconscious thoughts which were representative of the nature of thought and this was done in several ways. Breton had a fascination with Freudian Psychology which was popularizing psychoanalysis at the time of the Surrealism Movement. Sigmund Freud believed that accessing the unconscious mind and dreams could help patients deal with past traumas and understand their desires. Studying Freud, the techniques of the Surrealists closely mimicked many of Freud’s own techniques for his patients.

A topic of great interest to the surrealists was dreams. Dreams are generally accepted to be manifestations of the unconscious mind but their exact purpose has been argued and redefined through contemporary times. Since “surrealism believes Freudian criticism to be the first and only one with a really solid basis” (Breton, p. 160) it follows that to understand the artistic attempt to represent dreams and the unconscious mind one might look at Sigmund Freud’s interpretation of dreams.

Sigmund Freud on Dreams

Sigmund Freud is the originator of psychoanalysis who believes that every part of our personality and unconscious mind is influenced by our wishes and desires. He published his book on the interpretation of dreams in 1900 in which he argues that all dreams are a way for us to fulfill our fantasies. There are many common tropes in dreams which to Freud would represent the basic desires and needs that humans must have fulfilled. This would include sexual relationships, food, comfort and social connection. Freud also argues that most of the time our dreams disguise that which they are truly about. In other words, the subconscious mind creates metaphors that allow us to fulfill our wishes without us necessarily understanding with which wishes we are engaging.

Freud describes a unique and personal instance of a patient. The patient described a dream in which their nephew died and she was at their funeral. Freud claimed that after analysis they determined the dream was about her repressed love of a professor who used to be a family friend. The last time she saw him was at the funeral of her other nephew. Freud contended that her unconscious was manifesting this situation as a metaphor for her being able to see and interact with the person she loved.

According to Freud, if we pay attention to and have the ability to analyze the metaphors of our dreams we can tune into what our subconscious might be trying to tell

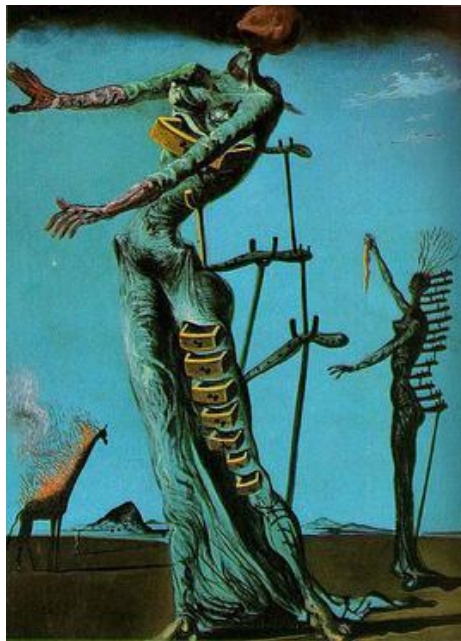
us about ourselves. We can learn about what we truly want and seek in life. Freud claims that dreams are compressed so that our minds can process the information and that understanding them requires “unpacking” to un-condense the symbolism.

Freud acknowledges that people would be unwilling to accept this claim in full. For instance what wishes would our nightmares be fulfilling? Freud claims that even nightmares are masked wishes or desires but that we have a harder time connecting the dots in these cases. Newer theories about dreams suggest that aside from Freud’s proposed “psychological release,” dreams also allow us to confront problems and fears in a safe space. I spoke to a friend who is a therapist who claimed that dreams can be a type of “practice for life” and was a proponent for this idea of preemptive or reflective exposure to situations through the subconscious mind. We can find new perspectives on problems or learn what makes us afraid or worried so that we can better understand it in our waking life.

While wishes are what our dreams are “about,” Freud describes the three places which may determine the specific content and way in which these wishes are represented. Recent events will often occur in our dreams. For instance, if you visited a new location or talked to a specific person, those things may appear in your dreams. Freud also states that many dreams are formed by childhood memories which is a connection to Breton’s thoughts on the unconscious mind. Freud described that with each new success he would have dreams of embarrassment because his father always told him that he would not be worth anything. Distant memories which defined who we

are as people will often come into play as the way in which our unconscious mind learns to communicate with us. The last source of dream content noted by Freud is bodily stimuli. Anything that happens to our body may translate into our dreams. For instance, shaking of the body or loud noises may be represented in our dreams as well as sexual stimulation.

Many Surrealists started using their own dreams as inspiration for their works. One of the most well known examples of dreamlike imagery comes from Salvador Dali. He created many paintings with absurd landscapes and symbols that don't seem to make much – if any – sense to the viewers. However, one could argue that the paintings contain metaphors that represent the inner-workings of Dali's mind.



The Burning Giraffe, Salvador Dalí – 1937



The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dali - 1931

Stream of Consciousness

One of the most popular techniques in the surrealist movement early on was that of automatic writing or “psychography.” This method of writing attempted to stop one from thinking and forming formal sentences or structure. The method was meant to allow the unconscious mind to take over and control the hand, allowing it to write each thought as it enters and passes through the mind. The thoughts may start to make abstract connections or none at all but they are meant to be the impulsive thoughts of the mind brought to paper.

Though not part of the surrealist movement, the beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg was a great example of this style of writing. His poem *Howl* (1955) contains line after line of

disconnected thought yet conjures potent imagery which shifts quickly. He writes of lifting cities to Heaven and jumping off rooftops holding flowers within a single page change (Ginsberg, p. 23-24). Though these ideas seem nonsensical when read one must assume that there is a reason that these thoughts came to Ginsberg's mind while writing. Of all the unbound things that have gone on paper these are the specific thoughts that ran through his mind and it was likely informed by his experiences and exposures to ideas as well as the context in which he was living.

Another example comes from Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Les Champs Magnetiques*:

"It was the end of sorrow lies. The rail stations were dead, flowing like bees stung from honeysuckle. The people hung back and watched the ocean, animals flew in and out of focus. The time had come. Yet king dogs never grow old – they stay young and fit, and someday they might come to the beach and have a few drinks, a few laughs, and get on with it. But not now. The time had come; we all knew it. But who would go first?"

This style of writing was trying to access an idea known as "Stream of Consciousness" and is often referred to as "Stream of Consciousness Writing" in contemporary times.

William James was the psychologist who coined the term "stream of thought" - now known as "stream of consciousness" – in 1890 in his *Principles of Psychology*. This understanding of Stream of Consciousness that was available during the Surrealist movement became an important crux for the structuring of my work. James believed

that in order to understand how people think it was necessary to start at the root or the unconscious mind and form some understanding of the processes by which it functions. Doing so in any other order he describes as flawed (James, p. 99).

Stating experiences in terms of sensations is problematic in James' mind as "consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations" (James, p. 99). In his attempt to describe "stream of thought" James outlines 5 "characters of thought:

- 1). Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness
- 2). Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing
- 3). Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous
- 4). It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself
- 5). It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects - chooses from among them, in a word - all the while

James describes a personal consciousness by explaining that

"In this room. . . there are a multitude of thoughts, yours and mine, some of which cohere mutually, and some not. They are as little each-for-itself and reciprocally independent as they are all-belonging-together. They are neither: no one of them is separate, but each belongs with certain others and with none beside. My thought belongs with my other

thoughts, and your thought with your other thoughts. Whether anywhere in the room there be a mere thought, which is nobody's thought, we have no means of ascertaining, for we have no experience of its like. The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's" (James, p. 99).

James is stating that we can only perceive and understand that with which we have some direct form of experience. The ways that we can think and understand the world are dependent on our own individual thoughts and memories which shape the lens through which we observe. In saying that each personal consciousness thought is always changing, James states that the "state of mind" is always shifting. The state of mind is a combination of thoughts and sensations. James stresses that "no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before" (James p. 101). This is because we are constantly gaining new experiences and our thoughts are always changing based on this if even slightly.

The "stream" of thought is continuous according to James, in that "the changes from one moment to another in the quality of the consciousness are never absolutely abrupt" (James, p. 103). The changes may create the sense of gaps or disconnects as the objects of the thought may seem unrelated but there is always (if even imperceptible) continuity. James goes on to state that "the breach from one mind to another is perhaps the greatest breach in nature" (James, p. 103) but that breaches

within a single personal consciousness do not occur as thought or sensation cannot be turned off entirely at all levels at any given time. James believes that any perceived break in consciousness is still a state of mind and that this state of mind is still always available for observation. He uses bamboo as an example for this stating that the transition of thought from one object to another does not break up the consciousness in the same way that a joint in bamboo does not break the bamboo as a perceivable whole. He also describes the state in which we are unaware of our focus shifting between two thoughts - using a clap of thunder and the time it takes for us to realize what has happened - as a state of confusion but not a state of lacking thought. The state happens almost instantaneously and is simply a "joint."

The fourth point was that the personal consciousness tends to deal with objects independent of itself. This means that thoughts do not exist in a vacuum, but are rather informed by outside forces and relationships external to the mind. James uses the term objects in a nontraditional sense. Rather than just meaning tangible items, James gives examples of objects that include experiences, visual data, sensations, memories etc. For instance, he describes one potential object as a musical note. If someone plays a note on the piano, every person present will experience the same note. This note is the "object" of our attention in this case and our state of mind will react in response to this object. This brings us back to an earlier statement that implies that we cannot be sure of how the personal consciousness of others experiences the same object as we can only be certain of "concrete I's and you's." While the object will serve to inform the state of

mind of all individuals present, the way in which those individuals' consciousnesses react will be different and informed by personal experiences and other factors.

Our personal consciousness chooses between experiences and other objects of information. For instance, if one had a memory of a birthday party at which they enjoyed themselves yet experienced an embarrassing event, the embarrassing event may become the object of focus of that time. This is why certain experiences or memories are more potent in the mind's of different individuals. Each person's consciousness can react to the same objects in different ways.

Memories are an integral part of what informs the consciousness of how to react to different objects or ideas. They are the building blocks and context on which we make future decisions and how our stream of consciousness reacts to certain thoughts. James states that in order for "a state of mind to survive in memory it must have endured for a certain length of time. In other words, it must be what [is called] a substantive state" (James, p. 273). James refers to a Professor Richet saying "To suffer for only a hundredth of a second is not to suffer at all. . ." (James, p. 273). This means that memories must be of a sensation or experience over a large enough time in order to brain to store these experiences as part of what defines us. He argues that momentary memories are not entirely useless but rather serve as the bridges between thoughts as imposed to integral determining and perceivable information about our self.

James refers to two stages of memory. The first - primary memory - is the lasting state of mind immediately after an object has stimulated it. For instance, if one received

an electrical shock, the sensation of the shock which persists after the shock has ended is the primary (immediate) memory. Secondary memory is what we typically think of when referring to memory. James also refers to secondary memory as “memory proper.” Memory proper is

“the knowledge of a former state of mind after it has already once dropped from consciousness; or rather it is the knowledge of an event, or fact, of which meantime we have not been thinking, with the additional consciousness that we have thought or experienced it before” (James p. 274)

This means that memory is not a direct experience of something in the past, but rather the acknowledgement of having once experienced a certain state of mind in relation to particular stimuli (events or sensations). This also requires “appropriation” or the belief that a memory is something that occurred to us and that we own. Otherwise it is simply something that happened in the past. A memory requires that we can compare the knowledge of an “image” with a state of mind in the past and recognize the image with our current state of mind. This lets us be sure that we did in fact “know” or experience the image because we have now associated it with two different states of mind - one which we can recall, and one in which we currently are.

James states that each time we remember something we acknowledge a previous state of mind associated with specific imagery, but that each instance of

remembering something is a separate event. This means that the state of mind (influenced by new objects and experiences) with which we associate the imagery that we perceive to be a past experience of ours can change with each remembrance. For instance you may have a fond memory of a person which makes you happy when you remember the state of mind in which the image was initially saved as part of your being. However, you may learn new information about the person which changes the state of mind with which you recall that imagery. In this sense memories are not simply a direct recollection or replaying of an event. They are the recontextualizing of objects we have experienced in the past with new sensations and states of mind. As our associations with certain objects and states of minds become defined we remember certain imagery with longing, and others with avoidance or other negative feelings. This is the way in which memories help to define our future decisions and associations with new objects in life.

The surrealists attempted to bring this idea of stream of consciousness to life with their free writing techniques yet the stream of consciousness is something that is very complex and hard to perceive.

The Importance of Cinema

Central to the Surrealist movement and their ideas was the use of cinema. “Surrealism revolutionized the art of cinema with new techniques and approaches that freed it from traditional story-telling, transforming the medium into one that could explore, reveal, and possibly even replicate the inner-workings of the subconscious mind” (The Art Story).

The power of cinema was in its ability to directly show an audience unreal images without the need for their mind to create them. Rather than text, which has inherent language barriers and requires the imagination of the reader to have full effect, cinema could juxtapose disjointed imagery in ways that could not be replicated in real life. With cinema's recent emergence into French culture in the early 1900's it was in a perfect position for the Surrealist movement to challenge the ideas that had already been formed as to what cinema could be. This led to Surrealist films which challenged the ideas of narrative structure and the taboos of what was appropriate imagery for an audience.

One of the earliest Surrealist films was *Un Chien Andalou* by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali. It was initially shown in 1929 in Paris and was meant to shock and horrify its audience. Bunuel claimed that "Historically, this film represents a violent reaction against what at that time was called 'avantgarde cine,' which was directed exclusively to the artistic sensibility and to the reason of the spectator" (Buñuel, p. 101). The film contains unsettling images of ants crawling on hands, detached limbs, and decomposing bodies. Dali claimed that the film was based on his dreams of ants as well as the general idea of the psyche's suppressed emotions. The film received positive reactions but this was to the dismay of Bunuel and Dali who had intended to shock their bourgeois audience and continued to make films to do so.

Bill Viola and the Non-traditional Use of Video

As I continued my practice I started to look at more modern examples of people who were breaking the rules and logic of their time as this was the sentiment which carried the Surrealist movement and would inform my artistic practice. One of the most influential artists I came across was Bill Viola. He shared my interest in video art but was using it in ways that I had never considered to represent some of the ideas I was interested in – particularly those of representing thought processes.

Bill Viola is noted as one of the pioneers of video art who uses video as an experimental form which transcends its commonly perceived limits and is a key model for the ideas in this project. The power of Viola's work comes from his willingness to alter his perspective and the ways in which he observes his medium before his work has even begun to take form. "Imagination is our key to the doorway of perception. The television medium, when coupled with the human mind, can offer us sight beyond the range of our everyday consciousness, but only if it is our desire. . ." (Viola, p.40).

In order to truly understand the intention behind Bill Viola's work, one must understand his perspective on his toolkit. Just as a camera watches and captures the world, Viola reflects on the camera and its properties as an observer. Viola acknowledges that each tool with which an artist engages has inherent properties unique to the tool. However, he believes that the unique properties of film and video have been discovered and publicly expressed and that it is therefore the job of artists to know these, but to not reiterate this common knowledge through their work. Instead,

they should expand the possibilities of the tool by incorporating its language to bring about new insights into how one views, understands, and reconciles their experiences and perspective. He believes that in using the tools at one's disposal, one might be able to come to a better understanding of one's self. Viola does not describe himself as using video in his work. He instead, states that he is sculpting with time. (Viola, p.232) He describes video as a tool he uses to engage with the materials of time and mind and this change in perspective allows for him to examine more potential within his tools.

Bill Viola describes that a desire of human nature is to be able to stop time in order to understand and retain an experience. He explains an attachment to memories. People perceive memories as stored episodes of an experience to which one clings in order to glean meaningful insight into the world. Viola expresses however, that despite an attempt to stop on these moments, the consciousness is forever moving and this creates a paradox where, "the underlying propensity of the mind to retain or arrest experience and the dynamic nature of both the experience and the perpetual movement of consciousness itself" (Viola, p.213) are at odds. In "The Stopping Mind," Viola uses the language of video and still imagery to describe this. Four screens are positioned in a room like a cube. Each screen plays imagery related to ideas of memory. Some play "archival footage (cultural memory) as well as home-movie-style created footage (individual childhood memory)" (p. 214). The images will remain still for an undetermined period, followed by a sudden burst of movement and sound before returning to stillness. The movement describes the flow of consciousness and

experience, while the stillness describes memory and the moment to process. Viola believes that without the stillness, the movement would become overwhelming.



The Stopping Mind, 1991

“The Stopping Mind” breaks the traditional rules of both video and photography at their time while incorporating the languages of both and adding a sculptural component. This careful arrangement of elements allows one a new way by which to view and contemplate the experiences. The placement of the screens allows for an immersive environment. Rather than engaging with a single screen in two dimensions, the viewer is surrounded by information as they would be in the real world. Had the videos simply played through without ever stopping the viewer would have no time to contemplate and only to experience. Had the images remained static, one would experience less and be left to examine individual memories. By understanding the rules of the media, Viola

demonstrates the strengths of each while knowing the correct ways to break them in order to create an entirely different experience which he believes more closely represents how humans understand the world.

Zach Poff and the Context of Video

Another artist that I was introduced to through my classes was Zach Poff. As I started to have interest in the idea of decontextualizing film and breaking down the formulae and logic of Hollywood cinema, Nate suggested that I look into *Explosions and Reactions* by Zach Poff.

This piece features two separate screens that are back to back and cannot be viewed at the same time. One screen shows explosions from Hollywood movies while the other shows characters reacting to these explosions. This is a common trope in action movies and by showing a successive series of these images they start to look absurd and overplayed.

This idea of decontextualizing images is what led to my piece *The Faces of Horror Versus Romantic Comedy*. By seeing the frequency and sameness of the images we can start to understand Hollywood cinema as formulaic and recycling ideas. Changing the context in which we view something can also alter our perspective on what we are viewing. When the reactions are connected to something we see them as a way to understand how we should feel about a specific action in a timeline. When they are separated, they become small portraits of human emotion recycled and repeated.



Explosions and Reactions – Zach Poff

Gaston Bachelard on Space as Metaphor

I started in my practice to take the ideas of the surrealists and other video artists to create my own video art which utilized spatial relationships. Some of my work fell flat early on and the importance of metaphor and placement of objects in imagery was something that came into question for me. In one of my first critiques I was asked about the haphazard or careless placement of objects in my work that led to unintentional metaphorical readings of my pieces. Particularly in my Dream installation I was questioned about the leaving of certain personal affects in the basement space of the piece. In all honesty I had not considered the great impact they could have on the audience reception or interpretation. I had been introduced to a book about creating spaces in an early class of mine and understanding now the importance of carefully crafting a space and that this would play a critical role in my thesis piece I looked back on my introduction to Gaston Bachelard's ideas of spaces as metaphors.

One of the most vital components of this project is the physical space in which to represent the ideas aforementioned. As demonstrated in some previous works discussed, the physical component and ability to navigate a space can add a lot to the experience. The metaphors of space through physical relation and chosen material can inform the audience. Gaston Bachelard was a French philosopher and psychoanalyst who developed ideas on how the representation of the mind as a physical space - for instance, a home - could help ease the navigation of thinking and categorizing of aspects of the personality.

A component of a space is the material with which it is constructed and the connotations - of which we may or may not be aware - that exist surrounding the materials. Bachelard describes an example of a bird's nest. He states that when daydreaming of a nest there are two possible ideas at play. The first is that a bird's nest is "precarious." (Bachelard, p. 122). One might assume that this would cause a level of discomfort or unease. However, Bachelard notes that when thinking of bird's nests one often feels comfort. He contends that this is because when we daydream we become "phenomenologists." In other words, we relate our direct experiences in life to our feelings and thoughts. Bachelard says that because we understand nests to be so connected to nature - being made from plant material - we feel comfort in the idea of the return to nature and the positive feelings with which we associate that idea (Bachelard, p. 123). We may not be aware at a conscious level that these unexpected connections are being made, yet Gaston thinks that they are vital in understanding the ways in which people perceive their surroundings.

Aside from the materials of a space, Bachelard describes the ways in which physical relations of and personal associations with space can be used as metaphors to classify and describe a flow of thought. The major metaphor to which Bachelard persistently refers in his book "The Poetics of Space" is the metaphor of the house. The house is a personal space that one associates with comfort and security and the way in which one imagines a house Bachelard believes can inform the state of mind in which they currently reside. He quotes Anne Balif saying,

"Asking a child to draw his house is asking him to reveal the deepest dream shelter he has found for his happiness. If he is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations" (Bachelard, p. 92).

Bachelard goes on to explain that if a child is unhappy it will be clear in the presentation of their house. There will be no warmth in the house. It may have darker colors and less stable structure. More rooms and door may appear closed off.

Bachelard describes the relation of rooms in a house as they relate to the spaces in which we experience certain types of thoughts or memories. He says that we consider houses with verticality and that the roof and the cellar can represent almost opposite ends of thinking. He speaks of the roof as obvious in its immediate purpose and therefore logical in a sense. "A roof tells its *raison d'être* right away: it gives

mankind shelter from the rain and sun he fears” (Bachelard p. 39). He goes on to speak of the cellar:

“ . . . we shall no doubt find uses for it. It will be rationalized and its conveniences enumerated. But it is first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths.” (Bachelard, p. 39).

This creates a duality between the two spaces. The space residing further up representing a reach towards the outside and logic, while the dark space further below or “within” the house represents a dark and mysterious entity to which one attempts to find purpose. This is the reasoning used for the installation of the Dreamscape project in the basement of the home. It is the part of the consciousness for which sense has not yet been fully made or understood.

Other rooms are then opened up for further metaphorical exploration. A living room contains the comforts of family life for instance. If one feels loved and social then the living could be a warm and inviting metaphor for this connection. Otherwise it may be barren or cold. A bedroom is a personal and introspective space in which one may feel more comfortable expressing or exploring their identity. This could make the bedroom a space for introspective and self-reflective thought. The way a space is

constructed and what connotations it may represent have to be considered when imagining the feeling that a space should give to an audience.

Developing Methods for Objectively Sharing Subjective Inner Experiences

As mentioned earlier the Surrealists who were trying to access their stream of consciousness in free writing had a difficult task at hand. The stream of consciousness is a complex thing and there have been many arguments as to whether or not representing it is even possible. In asking myself how to more accurately report something so subjective I came across a book titled *Describing Inner Experience: Proponent Meets Skeptic* in which Russel Hurlburt (proponent) argues with Eric Schwitzgebel (skeptic) about the possibility of accurately sharing stream of consciousness.

Russel Hurlburt believes that he has created a new methodology for more accurate reporting of inner experiences based on an extensive review of the pitfalls from past literature on the subject. One of the major issues with reporting inner experience according to Schwitzgebel, is that the further away temporally you are from the experience of the event, the more muddled the reporting becomes. Inner experience can't be reported in real time because it takes our brains time to understand and convert into natural language what it is that we are thinking or experiencing. This encoding of experience into language starts to alter the experience.

Hurlburt's method cannot solve this problem entirely but can afford a more broad and temporally proximal sampling of stream of consciousness. While he admits that we

likely cannot report inner experience in a perfect way, we can come closer using his method. The method requires impromptu “sampling” of one’s thoughts by calling attention to them through the use of classical conditioning with a signal – in his case, a buzzer. He gave participants a buzzer which would activate at times unpredictable to the subject. The subject would then have to immediately report the thoughts and feelings they were having at that moment. By using a trigger to make a subject “tune in” to their thoughts he believes that the major pitfalls of having too much time to think about the thoughts can be avoided. It forces the subject to make immediate and impulsive statements which is more in line with how stream of thought functions.

Chapter II: The Thesis Project

Inspiration

My thesis work is for me the natural extension of the ideas I have studied and the tools I have used. My interest in video and installation coupled with an interest in Surrealism and stream of consciousness were the catalysts for attempting to realize an idea I had when I was much younger. When I was a teenager, I started to express to people my frustrations that I could not share what was going on in my head with them. I stated that language was not enough to even come close to doing justice to my internal thoughts. I decided that talking about something and experiencing something were two dramatically different things and the reason that I could not feel understood may be because we can only talk about the experiences we have in our minds. As William James stated, the largest breach in nature may be that between two personal consciousnesses. I wished for a different way that people could share their thoughts and this led me to explore the possibilities of my toolkit of cinema.

I started to consider the stream of consciousness and how tuning into this constant churning expression of thoughts and experiences in our minds may help to inform us of who we are or how we think. I then wondered what might happen if instead of trying to describe the thoughts in my head, I could share direct access to the imagery it produced. Although the ideas in a stream of consciousness may not seem coherent or clear to the one thinking them – let alone an audience – I wondered if perhaps it could

provide insight into the way in which people thought or the things to which people may relate. Of course, by nature a stream of consciousness is highly personal and informed by one's own experiences, but maybe there are parts which one could understand in a more visceral way. I wanted to afford myself and others the opportunity to experience what it would be like to view an extension of the active mind and it's moving "objects" (James) from multiple angles and be able to explore through and around thoughts and the possible combinations a mind could create. This project became a means to represent the personal consciousness of an individual. Though a direct link to the personal consciousness is not possible as far as we know at this time, the idea was to represent it in a different way.

Question

Can Surrealist ideas and experimental techniques be applied to a more contemporary cinematic toolkit to represent a stream of consciousness and give an audience a positive and exploratory experience.

Methods of Development

An important component of this project is the gathering of raw material to present in the final product. This was the hardest thing to conceive for myself as the mind and stream of consciousness are complex and not fully understood. Yet, the methods of data collection and construction of the project had to best represent this somewhat

incomprehensible nature of stream of consciousness. As there is no currently available direct link between the mind and the external world I had to deliberate on the methods discussed in the contextual review used by other artists as well as the contemporary ideas on how to access the stream of consciousness. As implied by Hurlburt, perhaps the best we can do at this time is come as close as possible with what tools and knowledge we have available at this time.

With these things in mind I decided to follow a version of Hurlburt's methodology coupled with free writing techniques to gather my own material. As Hurlburt explains, the further away we move chronologically or the more time we are given to process a thought the less true-to-form it becomes. I decided to train myself to tune into my thoughts at non-scripted times of the day. I have kept a dream journal for a long time for prior projects and decided that I could use a separate journal for stream of consciousness writing. I started keeping this journal close by with a pen in my bag or on the nightstand in my room. I started with a few automatic writing exercises in which I wrote short phrases describing general imagery or "objects" and sensations that I noted moving through my mind.

I started to set multiple alarms on my phone at randomized intervals by spinning the number dials on the touch screen and allowing them to settle as they would before saving the alarms. I kept my phone on "do-not-disturb" during times I was at work or in class. When my alarm went off I would - as quickly as I could, given whatever situation I was in - take the journal and start writing down imagery that went through my mind

regardless of the appropriateness or relationship of the images. These images are what I came to describe as “thoughts” for the purposes of this project. Over time I started noticing that I would tune into the images that were going through my mind at times outside of the alarms. Without the use of alarms I started to take notes during these times as well, not wanting to be limited or to miss out on opportunities to record thoughts.

Once I had established notes and described images, I started to transcribe the thoughts by taking the descriptions of the images and shooting videos to represent them. I shot the videos in longer clips of one to several minutes knowing that later I would edit them down in accordance with the appropriate tempo for the work.

After having compiled a series of thoughts - or videos - I started to create the loops which were used in the project. These loops are representative of the flowing stream of thoughts as they continuously play without breach as described by James. I grabbed clips in no particular order and dragged them into the timeline of the video editing software. I zoomed the timeline out and hid the preview window so that I could not see which clips were where in the timeline. I then cut two to three second clips from the larger clips. After this I started dragging them in randomized order into three separate sequences (one for each loop). I did all of this to remove conscious decision from the way in which the collected data was curated. The sequences were exported and then put onto three external storage devices to be used in the installation.

Nature of the Content

The content is made up primarily of memories and recurring abstract thoughts. I noted a consistent use of certain types of objects and themes. There were images of sexual nature as well as the heavily repeated objects of food. There were also many instances of destruction to objects. Sensations were represented by images of ice, fire, facial expression, and other imagery as well as color correction in the video. Imagery of life and death were repeated through living creatures or rotting food. There were peaceful images such as placid water and hectic images such as heavy traffic. If I noted in my journal that certain images were repeated with more frequency I would represent this by shooting longer clips (therefore producing more clips of the subject when cut). Overall I found that the exercises I performed generated a wide variety of ideas and therefore content.

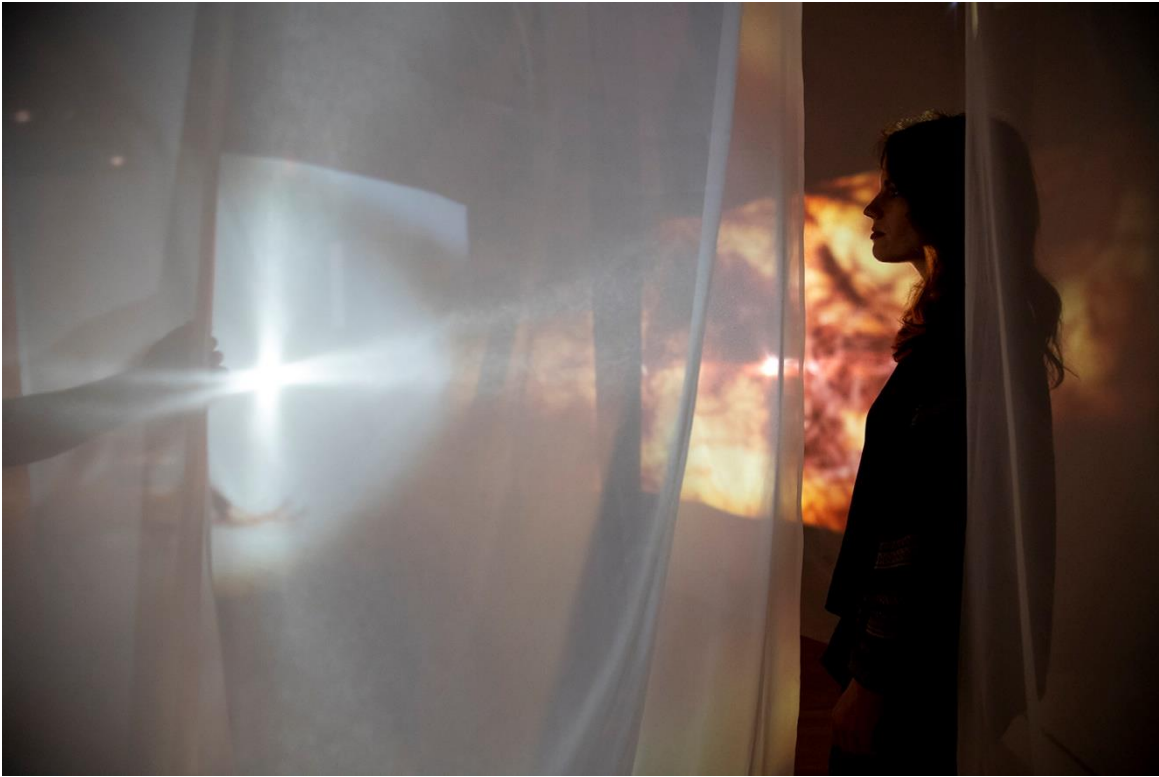
Physical Form

The stream of consciousness was created using multiple projectors and sheer fabric curtains. There are 12 curtains which are hung from the ceiling of the gallery space and drop from about 10 feet high to roughly three feet from the ground. The curtains are placed at different angles to each other. They are placed in layers with an “exterior” and continue inward giving volume to the installation. The curtains are close enough together to create an enclosed space but also remain far enough apart to allow

users to move through and between them. This creates a “maze” of sorts with multiple ways in which the audience can enter and move around the structure.

The projectors are placed around the outside of the structure and shoot light and images inward onto these curtains. Due to the semi-transparent nature of the fabric, the light passes through each curtain while still maintaining optical integrity on the surface. This allows the images to remain crisp and focused on the outer edges while diffusing, obfuscating, abstracting, and mingling towards the center. Each of the projectors plays one of several loops which contain very short clips, or “thoughts.” These images last for only a second or two before changing.

On the outside of the structure looking in the images are clear. As the audience moves further into the structure they become blurry and mix together with the other images. Depending on where one stands, one would see the images at different angles, in different levels of wholeness, and screened with other images. This means that the audience’s understanding and experience of the images will change depending on where they choose to stand and how they choose to interact with the space. The audience then plays a pivotal role in their own reception of the work through the willingness to interact or explore.



Space and Metaphors

As described by Bachelard a space can be made of different materials which impact how one reads the environment. The choice to use sheer fabric curtains speaks to the ephemeral nature of the subject matter. The thoughts are fleeting and hard to grasp. They shine on the fabric and dissipate with distance from the origin, becoming more and more unclear. To me the curtains also speak to the idea of a bedroom or a personal space. The bedroom is a personal space in which dreaming often occurs and where one finds comfort. It is also the personal space in which one often confronts their thoughts and experiences from the day when lying down to go to sleep. The darkness of the space was not only to allow proper lighting for the function of the projectors, but also to represent this dreaming or pre-dreaming state at night which allows a less-interrupted access to one's personal consciousness.

As the audience walks through the fabric they are able to push and move the curtains with ease. This represents the ability to push thoughts aside as the mind rejects certain objects and choose new perspectives. Each curtain serves as a sort of "wall" and can speak to the idea of walling off one's thoughts or pushing through "barriers" or "bridges" which are often used as a metaphor for our personal psychological issues we choose to ignore or confront.

There is an external and internal component present in the space. In the external component, thoughts are singular and clear. On the inside, the thoughts become

multiplied and jumbled, losing clarity for the audience the deeper one goes. This internal space is the inside of the mind in which thoughts meet each other in varying and less predictable contexts. They flow together and dependent on where the audience chooses to stand in the inner mind they will receive differing perspectives.

As described by James, no singular state of mind can ever repeat in exactly the same way. The loops run asynchronously so that the objects of attention are unlikely to repeat themselves in exactly the same way in any one person's visit. There are some gaps in the individual loops to represent the shifts or quieting of the "quality of consciousness" (James). The gaps present the audience with shifts in colors and visual tone and density to represent the transitional states of mind as the consciousness shifts between focuses. At times the gaps may line up and create a "bridge" to the next sequence of objects which the consciousness brings into focus.

The original idea for the projectors was to mount them to the wall higher up so that people could not block them. However, the final decision was to place the projectors lower down on podiums. This created an effect where people walking around outside of the "mind" would project their self through shadow onto and into the space. This idea represented to me the external influence that people have on the internal workings of the mind.

Measuring Success

This project attempts to represent an abstract idea and it is hard to expect that people will understand the precise nature of what is being represented on the first iteration. This project is also first and foremost an experiment which is the culmination of ideas that have been explored throughout a practice and the goal is not a successful work as much as it is to see what possibilities exist in pursuing this form and idea. This means that my definition of a successful project was not based on the interpretation of, but rather on the experience of the audience. My goal was for the audience to have some sort of visceral or emotional response to what was being experienced. As was the nature of the material, I did not want the audience to ponder and over-analyze the imagery but rather to let it flow as their own thoughts might.

To understand how the audience was reacting to the piece I mostly had to observe and listen in on conversations occurring around it. This was the main source of my understanding of how successful the piece was. I took note of several things but most important were the amount of time people spent and the ways in which they moved through the piece. I noted that some of the audience simply stood for a while along the outer edges watching the imagery. However, at some point most people understood that they should enter into the piece either by understanding the spaces created in the fabric as an invitation, or by observing the acts of others who were walking through the maze. I found that many people stayed inside for a while or sat in front of the piece. I heard several people trying to work out and discuss what the nature

of the images was. While some people fixated on working out what the details were, I heard many describing overall feelings. Some people described the images simply as “beautiful” or “colorful.” Some described feelings of warmth or light, while some mentioned discomfort at certain imagery. All of these descriptions of feelings are a good measure of success for me as a stream of consciousness may express or cause all of these things.

I consider the general response to be a success but noted things that need improvement for the overall experience and integrity of the ideas being explored. Some of these questions and concerns were brought up in reviews of the work later on and these will be noted in the “Future Iterations” section below.

Future Iterations

One of the most exciting things to me about this project is that the content that can be sourced for it is limitless and that the more content that is added over time – meaning the more sampling of the stream of consciousness that can be done - the more clear the picture of the ideas that can be painted.

One of the biggest concerns presented in critique of the work was that there was disconnect in the idea that this work represented a stream of consciousness. This was because the nature of the images came across as “everyday life” to some. This I found hard to avoid simply because the images were of a personal nature all coming from a singular source and this coherency may have been what implanted this idea. In the

writings there are more images that are nonsensical and clearly not from everyday life and including these with more frequency in the work could help to dispel some of this. Furthermore, William James describes the important of sensation and Hurlburt touches on the idea of the inner voice. These two things would lend a more concrete credence to the idea of stream of consciousness.

In viewing the work some of the audience described the sensations they experienced when looking at certain imagery such as the flames or tranquil water. Another piece to the puzzle is the idea of color and the relationships we have with them. As was done in my memory project, color associations could be used to describe sensations or connections to the imagery being shown. This would also help to break up some of the concrete images in favor of some that are abstract and harder to interpret. A sound component could also be helpful and was the original intent in the project. Due to complications of shared space that involved light and sound pollution from other projects, the focus was on the images but after this initial version of this work it has become clear that sound would push it to another level. In my journal I included some stream of consciousness writings that were related to my inner voice – meaning the verbalized thoughts we have in our head. This could be included but also in the same manner as the memory project, foley sounds that represent the ideas being shared could help to push the piece as well. This would create some disorientation of juxtaposing odd sounds and odd images that could help separate the “everyday life” from the stream of consciousness.

Another question that arose was related to the “randomness” of the piece. I used techniques to randomize the order of clips playing but still hand-cut each piece and though the alignment of the three loops is unlikely to repeat, each loop is still determinate in that it replays the same way each time. It is the context in which the three align that creates an affect of unpredictability. Yet even with three loops they will eventually repeat. I had discussed other techniques that could be used to create patterns or probability in the way that thoughts are placed together in the piece. In future iterations I am planning to look at software such as MAX/Msp to show images by placing all of the “thoughts” (video clips) into a single database and having them shown with certain relations to each other. For instance, certain thoughts will be more likely to lead into other related thoughts much in the way that a stream of consciousness can relate thoughts. Thoughts of a romantic partner can lead to thoughts of sexuality, or thoughts of family can bring about thoughts of early memories. In the current state, these types of relationships are only possible at random but a new approach to this could make these relationships based on probability which seems more in line with the way in which the mind works. This is also more in spirit with the Surrealist ideas of rejecting traditional methods and logic. Since videos are typically shown in determinate loops this restructuring can both challenge traditional construction of video while serving to enhance the metaphors.

Lastly there was some contention about the material choices and the physical construction of the work. I find the choices of material and the metaphors I hoped to convey sound. The constructing of a space with curtains was meant to be comfortable and inviting. Yet, the space was constructed as part of a larger space which – as

mentioned – was prone to light and sound pollution. I think that in order for a personal space containing personal content to flourish it needs to be isolated – just like a personal consciousness – and invite people to enter for the sole purpose of exploring it. As part of the curation of a greater show it was important that my piece had some visual weight to people outside of it in order to draw them into the gallery. In a future iteration however, I think that the piece should contain no external visuals and should only be accessible once someone has walked into the space. This would further help to insinuate that people ought to enter the work rather than to view it from the outside. By closing off the outside of the piece and requiring people to penetrate the barrier between it and outside world, people would be required to explore and move around it or to not experience it at all. This lies closer with the initial intent of the work. The work also ideally needs to be much larger scale to allow for more freedom in movement and a greater range of possibilities in perspective.

Though there is still a lot of work to do on future iterations of the piece I am happy with the aesthetic and experiential result. It offered valuable experience in the considerations of building a larger scale piece both as its own entity and as part of a larger show. I learned about compromises one makes when engaging with others in a space and also the importance of my own clarity in designing my work that I can address in future projects.

Chapter III: Portfolio Review

My works have all been rooted in the idea of perspective and perception. My goals have often included disorientation, creating wonder, and questioning the lines between what we think we know and the unknown. Throughout my graduate school career I have created works which engage with these ideas while experimenting with different media. While I stepped into the art world primarily as a photographer and videographer -and still use these media – I have expanded on my approaches while trying to understand the best ways to represent or test certain ideas. Although many of these works take different forms, they all seek to question “normalcy” in some way. This section will serve to outline the major works in my practice and the overarching themes which they explore.

Sequence of Self Doubt, 2018

Interactive Performance



This work was a major step outside of my comfort zone and was meant to test my ability to try new things and break formerly conceived limits. I also wanted to explore outside of my typical practice simply for the sake of expanding my base of knowledge and experience as well as becoming more conversant in other art forms. Inspired by Yoko Ono and Marina Abramovic, I wanted to create an uncomfortable piece which challenged the way in which an audience and artist interact as well as pushing the boundaries of what we consider to be taboo. On my body I wrote a sequence of

numbers. These numbers represented the parts of my body which caused me insecurities with 1 being the most insecurity and descending as the numbers climbed. I then presented myself to my audience and told them only that they could do whatever they wanted to me. I had decided that I would not fight anything and let myself be uncomfortable as my audience would be uncomfortable as well. The idea was that upon seeing numbers written on the skin, people would start to try and locate the entire sequence. The audience started lifting and removing articles of clothing in order to find the markings. This was performed in a large space under spotlights and was ended when the audience seemed to stop engaging with the artist.

I have suffered from body dysmorphia my entire life. From a young age I was seen as too small for a man and was openly mocked with jokes that made me insecure about showing my body in public spaces or even to people with whom I was intimate. Later in life I put on more weight and the problem became the opposite. At times I was only mildly overweight but translated this into a much more embellished problem. The dysmorphia was crippling for a while. I became so engrossed with my thoughts about how I looked and concern about how people perceived me that I would have to leave social functions just to use a mirror and reaffirm (or not) that I looked ok. I developed eating disorders, binging at times and at others not eating at all. I would avoid certain social gatherings that required removal of clothing just so that people would not have to see my “disgusting” body. I stood in front of mirrors for long periods of time just thinking about all the things I would change.

This performance piece was a way to take the insecurities that I've had my whole life and put them in the spotlight. Instead of trying to hide them I was actively encouraging people to search for them. At the same time I was asking the audience for my trust in that what they were doing was ok. We have many taboos about bodies, and how we share them and with whom. Although the audience was uncomfortable at points and unsure about how to interact initially, it was a performance that opened a great dialogue about the social expectations of bodies and the way in which artists invite an audience to a new or unexpected experience. It also fit the idea I've been exploring of art as an experience that one takes away as opposed to an object or physical form.

Paths – 2017

Flatbed Scanned “Rayographs”



When I first started in the program I had only really worked on photography or video from a purely traditional standpoint. The goal for me was to create something that was formally and visually appealing. Proper composition and lighting were paramount to my endeavors. This project was a chance for me to depart from those traditional views and really helped to set me down the path of considering what I really wanted to explore with my art.

Paths was about my process and not the end-result. I knew that each day I would walk mindlessly between classes and work with my only thought being getting from point A to point B as quickly as possible. One day I decided to be more mindful on my walks. On my journey between my starting point and end point I would take the time to consider my surroundings and all of the things that caught my eye which I normally would ignore. I noticed many interesting things including human-made items and trash,

interesting rocks, and eye-catching foliage. I decided to collect the things of interest that I found on three distinct paths that I regularly walked.

After collecting a bag of “stuff” for each of these three paths I decided to create an image as a record of the things that I noted. Having been studying Ray Man at the time I found myself inspired and enthralled by his Rayographs which took everyday mundane items and made them appear fascinating and even surreal or otherworldly. I tried to replicate this type of look with a flatbed scanner by placing the items directly on the glass and scanning them.

The important thing about this project for me was that the images that resulted were not the project in my mind. The project was the everyday action of walking while practicing being more mindful of my surroundings. For me, the work was in the experience and the intent to be here in the world and attempt to break – if even slightly – from the monotony of a mundane routine to rekindle some sense of wonder in the world. The images that resulted serve only as a reminder and a relic of this journey.

Mirrors – 2016

Photo & Video Composites



Mirrors was the first big project I completed as part of my time in the Intermedia program. It was also my first attempt at straying from traditional presentation of the forms with which I was working. It was meant to be unsettling as well as to challenge the audience expectations of what they were observing.

Mirrors was a series of photo and video composites which were presented as framed still photographs. However, each “photograph” had a video component masked in underneath the photo. On certain intervals (typically two to three minutes) the video component of the images would play for a few seconds before freezing again in a new position. The audience experienced several different possibilities. They might note a sudden movement in what before appeared to be a still-image. However, if they were not looking at the image during the time of the movement, they may look back at another time and question whether the photograph had changed since they last saw it. There was also the possibility that they would view the photograph without noting a change and without viewing it again. Many people reported feeling uncomfortable as if the images were “haunted” or changing when they were not looking. This prompted some audience members to stand adamantly in front of the images waiting to catch them in the act as if they outsmart the artwork in some way.

The nature of the images was focused on the idea of identity and the way in which it shifts. This is where the metaphor of reflections moving in mirrors was used. I had been thinking a lot about the idea that people have two types of identities (in a broad sense): the outward self which we project to society and which others view, and the inner self which is who we truly feel we are on the inside. The idea behind mirrors was to express how these two selves can often disconnect or become “out of sync.” In some versions of the image, the figure and their reflection may mirror each other. Moments later, a reflection may have moved out of sync with the figure. My favorite aspect of showing this work was that each audience experienced it differently

depending on how they chose to view it. Whether they viewed it one or multiple times, for long or short periods, as well as other factors gave the possibility for unique experiences.

Barriers – 2018

Multiscreen Video Installation



Barriers was an attempt at further exploring the possibilities of the media that I was exploring at the time. I was inspired by video artists who were using physicality and installation techniques as metaphors for space and changing the ways in which we view or understand video. While video is typically seen as a two dimensional medium where one stares at a screen and watches something happens, using multiple screens and positioning them in relation to each other can greatly change the way one looks at the imagery in front of them.

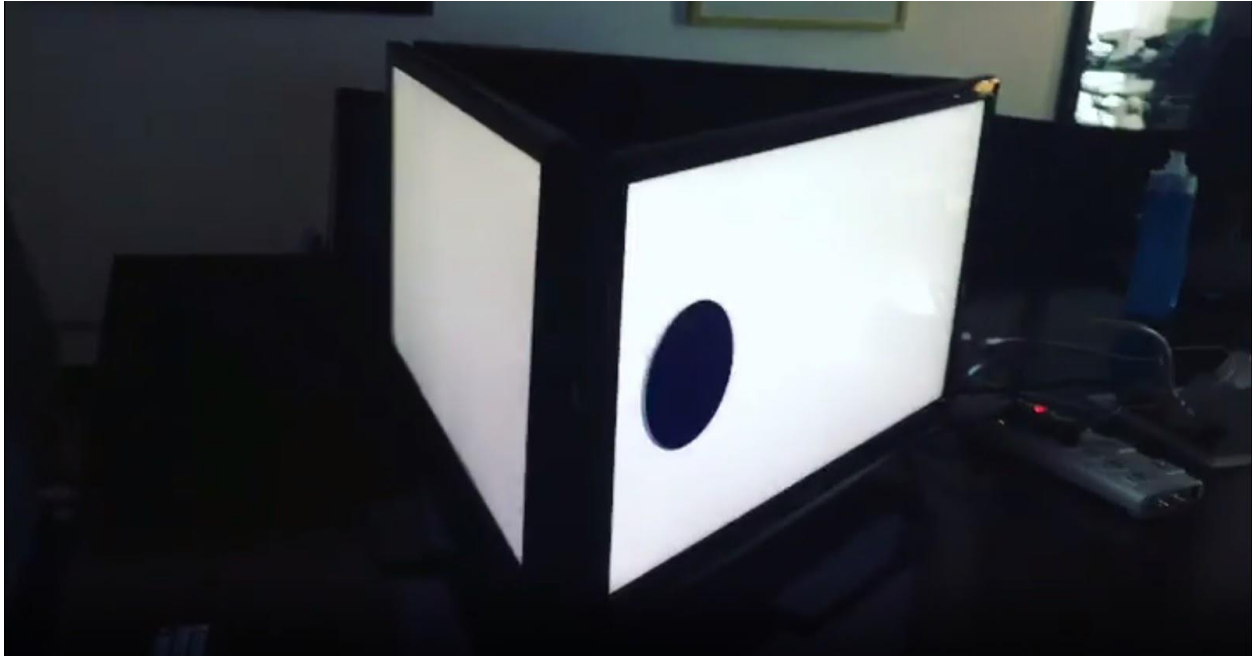
Barriers used the physical separation of screens as a metaphor to illustrate the non-visible aspects of what was transpiring in the images. The piece was about the way in which people share and move through space. I had noticed in the house in which I

was living that each night people would claim certain areas of the shared spaces. This claiming was done non-verbally but seemed to simply be an understanding that each person about what space was there's. I wanted to see if the camera could capture over time the ways in which people moved through shared space and how they negotiated the "traveling" and intrusions of space which occurred. To this end I set up several cameras in the shared living space and just let them run as people went about their normal lives. After recording, I put each video onto separate screens and then set up the screens in the same physical setup as the space in the videos (i.e. the furthest left part of the room on the furthest left screen and so on). In this way, the invisible and imagined barriers of the spaces that people claimed were manifested in the physical and tangible barriers of the screens.

When someone moved into someone else's space the audience could witness the transition of that person from one screen to another. Over time this sort of "dance" through the space starts to illustrate how the subjects understood the space and their places in it as well as their relationship with the other subjects and their space. This piece was an important experiment in my practice as it helped me start to conceptualize the ways in which I could use and sculpt physical spaces for video in order to create new metaphors.

Ball Trick – 2018

Multiscreen Video Installation



Ball Trick was a response to a prompt to create a piece that involved some sort of movement. The piece is made of three screens placed in a triangle with the images facing outwards. An animation of a ball moves around from screen to screen. It seamlessly moves between the physical edges of the screens without breaking stride. At points in the animation the ball may reverse its movement or split into multiple balls which travel in different directions. This is another example of how I have used physical aspects in video art to create a different way of viewing the work. Particularly when the ball splits there is no way to view both balls at the same time or to check what is happening on multiple screens.

Most of the audience moves in a circle around the screens in order to keep track of the ball. Some of them will stay still and ponder one screen waiting for the ball to return. When the ball splits and the subsequent objects travel in different directions, the audience may split and circle in opposite directions before converging as the balls do at a new point. This dance that the audience performs along with the ball is the piece.

My intent was for the videos of the ball moving to serve as a script. The audience performs the real piece unknowingly with the decisions they make and the way they move around each other and interact while trying to follow the ball. In a sense the ball becomes the conductor, telling the audience where to move, at what speed, and when to change directions. This is a subversion of what is typical when viewing video art. While the audience normally stands and regards something happening on a screen, Ball Trick allows the artist to view the audience as they perform a piece while being led by the script. This was a piece that helped me start considering what happens when you ask an audience to engage bodily with video arts. What new depth and possibility does this unlock?

The Faces of Horror Vs. Romantic Comedy – 2018

Single Channel Video



The Faces of Horror Vs. Romantic Comedy is a collection of images from two different genres of movies. As the title suggests, one is romantic comedy and the other is horror. These two genres seem to have nothing in common, but this piece serves to illustrate the opposite. The piece was created by isolating the “reaction shots” from each film. This is to say, the images of characters’ faces as they respond to things happening on screen. By taking these images and removing them from their context one can see that the films are actually very similar to the point of being indistinguishable at points. The images were overlaid and played on top of each other to create a collage of the “faces” of the movies. This was then presented as a single channel video.

The idea of decontextualization became a fascinating one to me as it brings up ideas about how context informs the way we think about the world around us. I was turned on to Zach Poff and his piece “Explosions and Reactions.” I liked this particularly as a critique of Hollywood cinema and the tropes with which it is laden. My piece was a further critique of Hollywood cinema but particularly of the formulaic approach with which films are created. Although the movies used in this piece are of seemingly disparate genres, the core elements of the films are similar. Most Hollywood films follow a familiar plot of decline into problem before understanding and execution of a resolution.

The reaction shots in a film are a way for the director to show the audience how they should feel about a situation as they empathize with the characters on screen. Whether we should feel happy, sad, shocked, or confused is dictated by the faces of the actors. When the context is removed and all that is left is the shots of actors “telling us what to feel,” the movies are fairly simple. They start out with lighthearted or neutral faces and grow gradually into disarray, stress, or melancholy. Over time they will lighten up again as the plot resolves. When seen this way we can understand that regardless of the filler in between, a movie is something that is meant to make us feel a series of emotions over a period of time. The formula of empathetic responses to certain emotions remains the same in most productions.

God - 2018

Single Channel Video



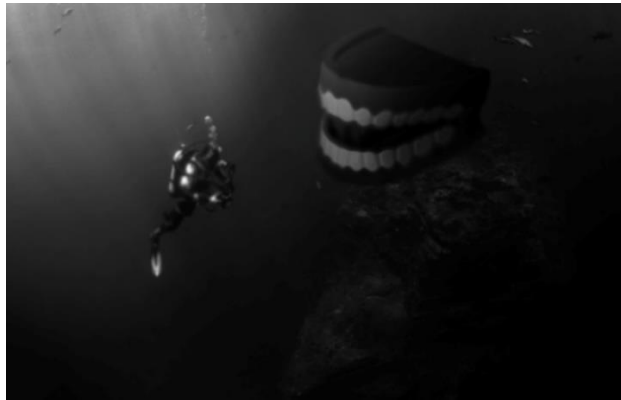
God was a further exploration of decontextualization as it relates to Hollywood Cinema in an attempt to uncover patterns or formulae in the productions. This piece took the trailer for the newest Godzilla movie and removed the “Zilla” (monster) from all instances of the imagery. What resulted was a display of chaos and destruction and characters fleeing from what appeared as natural disasters. In the story of Godzilla, the monster is a metaphor for the evil of humanity. I wanted to see if removing the metaphor as a plot device would dramatically change the way in which we understood the events. By removing the “Zilla” from the scenes we are just left with the “God” in “Godzilla.” This seemed fitting as it appeared as though the “wrath of God” were raining down on the characters. God in this case serves equally as well as the monster as a metaphor for

self-wrought destruction. The audience is also never able to see what exactly is causing the events in the images.

Hollywood has an obsession with destruction and both the metaphorical and literal destruction of humankind. This project allowed for a new (lack of) perspective on the destruction which allows the audience to fill in the missing context with whatever reasoning they see fit. This also touches further on the idea of a formula explored in the previous project. The trailer could be a trailer for just about any movie involving mass destruction. It is simply a series of people reacting in shock and horror telling the audience that they should feel an overwhelming feeling of concern and uncertainty about the state of the world.

Dream Journal Photographs – 2018

Digital Photo Composites



I became very interested in questioning the barriers of reality early on in my practice. I started studying the surrealist movement which seemed to embody the ideas by which I was most fascinated. The surrealists believed that the purest forms of thought were not just the ones that we hear with our inner voices. They are impulsive thoughts from the subconscious mind. When we speak about a thought we have – or even continue to imagine it in our mind – we inadvertently taint it by filtering that thought through layers of social, cultural, and environmental conditioning. The way in which each person perceives the world around them is influenced by the experiences they have had along with this conditioning. The surrealists believed that if one could see or experience thoughts before they had been filtered then one could better understand the nature of thought or what it meant to be human. To this end many surrealists created methods for creating “automatic” art, or art that was created on intuition and unburdened by an overabundance of thought. The most common form of this art started with Andre Breton in France in the form of automatic writing. It was a technique where

the writer wrote down each thought as they entered the head without filtering or structuring. Now people often refer to this as “stream of consciousness writing.”

In this project I chose a different method for creating content. For months I kept a dream journal where I wrote down as much detail as I could remember about a dream on the moment of waking. Dreams come from the unconscious mind and are unfiltered by logic. They remain subjective in that they are informed by our subconscious, our experiences, and our moods yet, at most times, we have little to no control over these thoughts our brain conjure up while we sleep. This is what made dreams such a topic of excitement for surrealists and why I chose to focus here.

I created a series of images which represented the wonderful, exciting, creepy, and terrifying aspects of some of my most vivid dreams. These are presented as photographs and were created using photo editing and compositing software.

Dreamscape Installation – 2018

Multiple Screen and Projected Video Installation



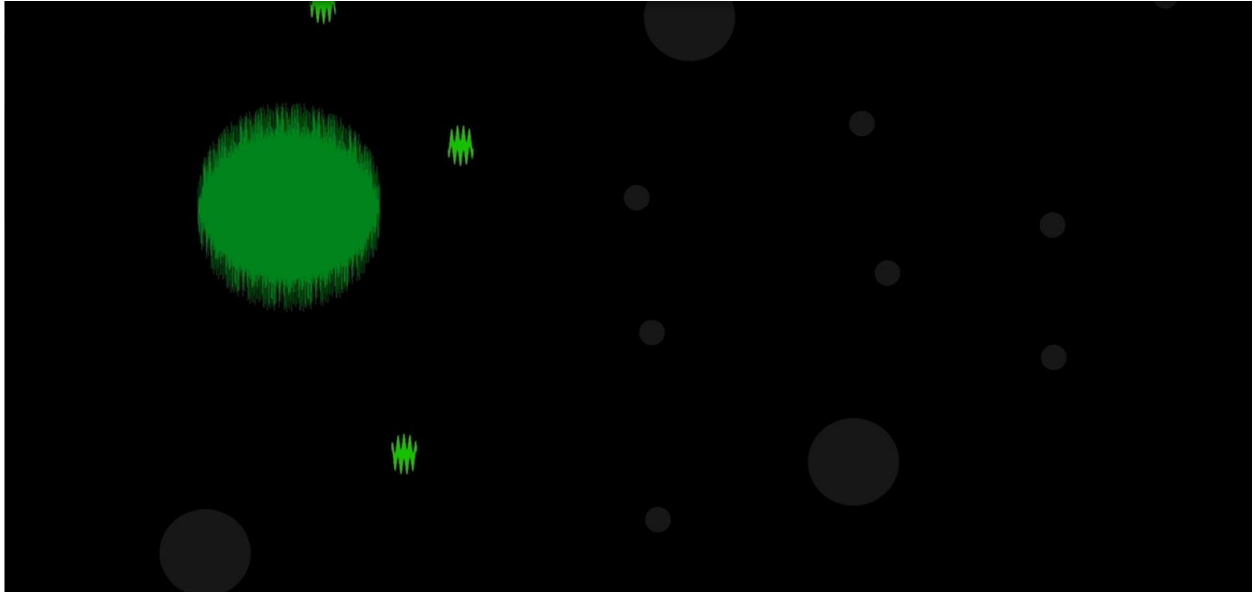
The Dreamscape project evolved out of the works from my dream journal and were a continued exploration of ways in which physical additions to video art can affect the way in which the audience understands the work. I took many of the images from my dream journal and reworked them into time-based pieces with animations and also recorded sound components for many of the dreams. I used multiple screens and points of projection to add a structural aspect to the project. This structure combined with moving images helped in being able to represent some of the impossible environmental and physical happenings of dreams. For instance, a character from a dream may be able to reach through a box and have their hand appear and grab something from a screen on a different side of the room. A character may also suddenly be transported

from one location to another without warning. This is disorienting in the same way that a dream may be. The audience may try to keep track of characters, or wonder about the metaphorical aspects of such physical relations between imagery.

The Dreamscape was installed in the basement of my house. I found this to be a suitable setting for many reasons. Having read “The Poetics of Space” with Bachelard’s wonderful metaphors for the spaces of a house relating to the mind, I considered what different areas of a house could represent. I decided that the basement could serve as a way to “descend into the subconscious of the artist.” Dreams arise from the subconscious mind and I wanted the audience to experience a literal delving into a deep, underground, and personal space. Starting from the well-lit kitchen, the audience goes down a stairway into continually darkening space until they enter a room full of moving and shifting imagery. Here they are free to explore the dreams but also the unfiltered clutter of the mind as represented by the clutter of personal belongings kept in the depths of this space.

Memories – 2018

Multichannel Video Projection



The memory project came from a more personal place for me. I kept remembering my earliest perceived childhood memory. I was somewhere between two and three years old. My brother, mother, and I had gone to my grandparents house in a town a couple of hours drive away from where we lived. When we got in the car to go home I remember a thunderstorm happening. I don't remember much other than that my mother was frightened due to a tree falling down in the road in front of our car. We had to travel back to my grandparents house and stay there for a while before trying to make our way back again.

I vaguely remember the specific events but note that the most potent components of this memory for me were the colors and the sounds. I actually remember

this experience quite serenely. I was too small to see out the windows of the car but I remember the rain falling on the glass and the light patting sound it made. Most vividly I remember a dark stormy blue color. I've often thought that the blue was not a realistic or even possible color for the sky yet it is so strongly attached to my memory. I began to think about why we remember certain aspects of events or why we may remember them differently than they happened. With this I started to research memories and how they are formed.

I found many interesting things in my research. Most notably was that memories don't work in the way that we may typically think. They are not stored in our minds as single events but rather as individual fragments of certain senses or moments. Whenever we recall a memory, we take these individual components and reconstruct the memory from context like a puzzle. The way in which we reconstruct a memory may not always be the same and invariably changes the further away we move temporally from the event. The way we remember things can also be dramatically shifted by new experiences, our current mood and environment, the way we feel about the people or places involved in the memories along with other factors. These ideas fit well into my exploration of identity as it is informed by innumerable external and internal events and conditions.

For this project I asked a group of participants to verbally recount their earliest memory in as much detail as possible. This included giving descriptions of the senses involved including the sounds, smells, sights, and feelings. What I learned from this was

that the earliest memory that most people could recall almost always had to do with being in a new location, or involved in a novel activity with loved ones. It seemed to me then that people must place stronger emphasis in the mind on new experiences or information. I also asked each person to imagine the colors they associated with the memories. With all of this information I edited the sound clips of the stories, added foley of the described sounds, and created groupings of color associations for each memory.

The memories were presented in a four wall projection room. The room was filled with orbs which I considered to be “neurons” of a brain. As a memory was being verbalized, certain neurons would light up with the color associations provided for that memory and would also light nearby cells which play sound associations or signify secondary color relations to the memory. This created a “collective mind” in an immersive environment in which different voices may speak from different areas of the installation and light up multiple cells simultaneously. Depending on where the audience stood or moved they would get different experiences of the stories being told.

Chance to Imagine – 2018

Digital Photo Composites



Chance to Imagine is an extension of my interest in the things that happen to us and which we witness each day. I am intrigued with thoughts of how minor things that happen around us can have major influences on what we do and who we are. A lot of what we experience and think can be traced back to what we choose to notice in or observe in our environment at any given moment. There are countless chances for us to notice and be inspired by things. This project was meant to capture the idea of this chance to inspired by unexpected things.

I use several stock photograph websites at times to create digital photograph composites. The photographs available on these sites are contributed from people all around the globe. Due to this, users of the site can see through the lens of people with different cultural backgrounds and experiences to them. This exposure to new imagery and ideas has often had a profound effect on my imagination and the way that I think about the world and other people.

One day I decided that I wanted to see what could happen if I were to observe through other peoples' experiences by chance. I went to one of the stock photo websites and numbered each image on the front pages (they change each day) with the newest image being "one" and increasing in order as the images progressed. I then used a random number generator to select a series of images from this site. Each one of these images represented a captured moment in the life of someone else. The photographs represented places people had been and things they had seen that were interesting enough to the people to justify the time to snap and share a photograph. I downloaded the selected images and then set to work editing them in whatever way I felt inspired to do. I worked on intuition created a new images from the selected images based on whatever first came to mind.

This was a great way for me to tune into these "chances" for my imagination to be inspired. The collaborative aspect of creating images from those shared by people around the world also allowed me to combine the experiences of others with my own subjective experiences and thoughts. I presented the images on an iPad tablet as a nod to the idea that the way in which we often share these moments of our lives through apps for social media. Each photograph was presented with the original and the edited version of the image.

The Dream Newspaper – 2019-xxxx

Digital Photo Composites and Short Stories

This project is currently underway. While in the past I had worked exclusively with my own dreams, I had always been interested in the parts of the human psyche that are shared. It is believed that although the way in which we express the ideas are influenced by culture, conditioning, and personal experience, the base of human thought can be reduced to certain key and consistent ideas. For instance, most people think about sex, food, violence, human connection, nature every day. The way in which we think about these things will be different from person to person and culture to culture but regardless of the “symbols” or metaphors we use to consider these ideas, the ideas are shared amongst all or most people.

I started to imagine the “dream world” as a place that is shared by all people regardless of what other differences we may have. It is the place our mind goes in an unconscious state to process the information that the brain has acquired throughout each day. It can help us to make sense of our troubles, prepare us to deal with anxieties, or allow us to act out our deepest fantasies in a safe way. I started to wonder if being exposed to other peoples’ personal experiences in this shared realm might help to better understand people.

This project will allow the audience to submit things that they have “witnessed” in their own experiences in the dream world. The stories will be written and shared in the

magazine so that others can share in the stories and goings-on of this space. In my mind the dream world exists metaphorically as something that all people are capable of viewing and experiencing. By posing it as a singular space into which people venture to explore their identity and humanity I hope to create a sense of community and connection amongst the audience of this work. The idea to put it into the format of this newspaper comes from my desire to treat these subjective experiences in an objective way and to provide validation for peoples' experiences. This project is in the early stages of development but I believe it will serve to help me explore the ideas of shared-subjective experiences.

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how he came to think about video as a metaphor for thought and consciousness. His intent to create immersive experiences by manipulating the ways that cinema can be used outside of traditional contexts is a vital informant for the techniques in the thesis work.

Biography of the Author

Adam Paul was born in Farmington Maine where he grew up and attended Mt. Blue High School. He attended University of Maine and received his BA in New Media in 2016 with a minor in Studio Art. Throughout his graduate school career he has worked as a workshop coordinator for tech labs as well as a teaching assistant for programming in New Media. Adam is a candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Intermedia from the University of Maine.