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IMAGES OF NOSTALGIA:
AN EXPLORATION IN THE CREATION OF RECOLLECTION THROUGH VISUAL
MEDIA

by

ALLYSON MARY LORANE DICKERSON
B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Art
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Christopher J. Harris

ABSTRACT

I create innovative artistic works in which the experiential consciousness of the viewer drifts between objects, images, and the auditory narrative. The work approaches the visualization of memory and the catharsis of the loss felt from death. The projection of light onto lifeless entomological specimens mimics the projection of memory as a means to return to what has been lost. The digital copy of the specimen flickers across their bodies as a tribute to the movement that once possessed them. *A List of Things that Quicken the Heart* is a body of multimedia installation and single channel work that has been completed as part of my candidacy for an Emerging Media: Entrepreneurial Digital Cinema M.F.A. at the University of Central Florida.

The single channel video work is created in the essay film mode. The visual elements of the piece are a blend of the effect of contextualizing disparate images and subjects. It is the means by which the audience is led to draw connections to the subject of memory without making any specific inferences. As the assembly of images takes place, so too does the assembly of theoretical and observational threads in the essay narration. As the filmmaker, I am speaking directly to the viewer about the implications of my experiences and observations. The editorial rhythm is such that the viewer is allowed brief pauses in the flow of information to meditate on the subject of nostalgia, and how the film incites them to consider the notion. There will also be an ambient audio component designed with the idea of creating a subtle, auditory contrast between familiar and uncanny ambient sounds.

The correlating installations will serve as artifacts of memory, the physical objects relevant to my own nostalgia, which will help to serve as a recollection of the narration. In order

to integrate them with the tone of the essay film, the narration will be played as a separate component through speakers that surround the space, so that it will envelope the viewer.

Dedicated to Nancy Mary Hynes, my Maña.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge my mentor and thesis advisor Christopher J. Harris. Who has dedicated a substantial amount of time and effort to shaping me into the artist I am today. Most of all, I admire his ability to untangle the messy web of ideas in my head and articulate them in a way that I can understand them. Thank you, Chris, and know that in me you have a lifelong student and friend.

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Thank you to those in SVAD, faculty, staff, and students. Many of you have played integral roles in my development and have become like a family to me. Particularly, my MFA cohort who it has been my pleasure to learn and grow with.

Thank you to Forrest DeBlois for being my other half and love of my life, for pushing me to work, make, and think, even though I constantly push back. Thank you for wonderful adventures and conversations that have indelibly shaped my life experience. You made this whole thing worth it.

Finally, thank you to my family, my parents in particular. You are the keeper of my most fundamental memories of love and what it is to be me.

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INTRODUCTION: FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Upon entering the UCF Entrepreneurial Digital Cinema M.F.A. program, I knew that I wanted to explore the boundaries of what the program allowed, and had initially intended on producing an experimental feature. I was fortunate enough to enter at a tumultuous juncture in the program that saw the integration of cohorts from studio art and digital media. This merger had an immediate and indelible effect on my work, both in concept and form. This change was initially very challenging, as it exposed my substantial gaps of knowledge in the breadth of the fine arts. It left me feeling creatively unsatisfied as I quickly began to crave avenues for my work that I struggled to articulate conceptually, and was technically unable to execute. Though discouraged at the start, I found myself rapidly evolving and thriving in an interdisciplinary environment.

As a result of working in close proximity to artists with studio practices, my own practice expanded beyond my previous mode of filmmaking which focused on producing work for conventional, theatrical exhibition. I use digital video and hand-manipulated film to reanimate dead entomological and botanical specimens. I incorporate both installation based, unconventional projection surfaces and traditional single channel moving images to explore the relationship between the immediacy of light projection and the ubiquity of the technical medium. Using image creation and light projection as a metaphor for the visualization of memory, the works serves as a transcendence of impermanence.

The measure of success for this thesis project is in the scope of the body of work that I have amassed and the development of my technical proficiency. Those accomplishments are

invaluable to me, and far exceeds any sort of external metric. I have also strived to make connections with other artists and organizers in the community. In doing so, I was able to put on my first solo show, *Bugs and Other Beautiful Things* at The Guava Tree Gallery, and participate in several other group exhibitions. Moving forward I will continue to expand the range of my artistic practice, and foster relationships with multidisciplinary artists and exhibitors.

CHAPTER 1: EVIDENCE OF AESTHETIC LITERACY

Capturing Memory with the Moving Image

Though the creation and use of images may never precisely capture a particular experience, it may trigger a flood of recollection, a realization of the universality of this subject, and be used as way to experience the memory in a new way. I am interested in expressing my own psychological experiences, both as a means of self-discovery and to connect with a viewer through the comprehension of human nature. One of the most effective tools in this process is the access to and representation of memory. For me, a memory is the thought of a feeling. Feeling, in this case, is the appreciable radiation of sensory emanating from all objects and persons in a given moment of time. The experience of nostalgia is the longing to savor that feeling once it has passed. I utilize a multiple visual media and artistic techniques to create work that is meant to provide space for the viewer to identify and contemplate their emotional response to the material, and to give them the opportunity within that response to let their mind wander. The viewer may find a way to access a sentiment of nostalgia, that while uncomfortable, makes them cognizant of the power that lies in their memories that are buried beneath the rubble of consciousness.

The aesthetics encompassing an experience are the foundational bricks for shaping the images that recall an event once it has passed. The longing to experience that memory again is nostalgia. I envision a memory as if it were an experimental film. Utilizing all senses, it draws the beholder through varied junctions to narrative, visual apparitions, and psychological convolutions. Image making is a useful tactic in capturing and repossessing the spirit of an aesthetic experience, and giving it some sort interminable tangibility. Arthur Shimamura, whose

research focuses on the neural basis of human memory and cognition, states that nature of aesthetic experiences can be approached from a multitude of perspectives and that there are four major philosophical approaches to consider when doing so through visual media

“1) mimetic approach or how successfully an artwork offers a window to the real world, 2) expressionist approach or how well an artwork expresses feelings and moods, 3) formalist approach or how well an artwork induces a sense of significant form, and 4) conceptual approach or how well an artwork conveys intellectual or thought-provoking statements.” (Shimamura)

I direct my process to utilize both expressionist and conceptual approaches. Through anecdotes and observations, the film addresses the aesthetic construction of memories, both metaphorically in the image montage and literally in the voice-over narration. In the candid delivery of my subjective thoughts, and the immersive environment of the exhibition of the film and its corresponding film and video installations, I can create a mood for the viewer to engage with my work emotionally.

The possibilities for assigning artistic interpretation to the memory of an event are virtually endless and completely subjective. “The color in which we have most consistently seen an external object is impressed indelibly on our memory and becomes a fixed property of the memory image...All objects that are already known to us from experience, or that we regard as familiar by their color, we see through the spectacles of memory color.” (Hering) Through experimentation with the moving image and its environment, I apprehend the essence of how a memory is rendered in the mind’s eye, and create an object that constructs the bridge between my present and past self.

Aesthetic Literature Review

In considering how I could engage the challenge of creatively representing an elusive concept such as memory, I have found several artists that will be particularly influential in the development of my process to solve this quandary. Stan Brakhage, a revolutionary avant-garde filmmaker, believed that humans are intrinsically creative, basing this thought on studies of cave painting and the need in children to create simply for the act of creating. He says “The only thing that film is – that’s a real wonderful distinction for me – is that it is the first time we have a way really to show the full spectrum of moving visual thinking”. (Abbott) Brakhage was admittedly hermetic in his practice, and he believed that the mystery of the world could not be mastered. He spent an entire career alone in the workroom exploring that mystery through his art, an art which was unaffected by commerce and other ulterior motives and remained dedicated to honoring the purity of creativity. Much can be taken away from the solitary nature of his artistic process, and the power in the images that were the fruit of such an exercise. For this project, I will also draw from his use of solely visual abstraction to convey emotion, experience, and connotation. The piece of most significance to me, regarding this project, is *Mothlight*. In this short film, Brakhage attempts to illuminate the life and death of a moth by affixing physical parts of moths and plants to clear 16mm and projecting through them. In one installation, *Untitled #2*, I derived my process directly from Brakhage’s technique.

Another filmmaker, Chris Marker, whose work extends beyond the essay film and into the realms of video and multimedia art, will be studied for the use of fragmented visuals, the arc of the reflective essay narration, and the relationship of diegetic sound between the two.

Marker's film *Sans Soleil* is my greatest artistic influence for essay filmmaking. It exemplifies all of the facets of the form in their purest, most contemplative form. The images, an amalgamation of archival footage, excerpts from TV and film, and 16mm footage shot by Marker himself, are durative and the narrative is meandering. The narration, delivered in the form of letters from a loved one traveling abroad, embodies the essence nostalgia, in long, winding accounts of new experiences in relationship to what is familiar. As a result of this influence, I have chosen to loosely structure my essay narration around a letter that is simultaneously written to me and to someone close to me that I've lost.

The third of my major influences is Bill Brown, a self-proclaimed, nomadic essay/documentary filmmaker. In each of Brown's films lie ghosts of the past, about whom he delivers meandering anecdotes. Brown himself is also a subject of his films, and his interpretations of that which he experiences when exploring their themes and subjects. The most telling instance of this occurs in his film *Confederation Park* when he is comparing his nostalgia of geese honks with a comrade from Canada. He asks of his friend what season the "honk, honk" of the geese reminds him of, and it's springtime, of course, because that's when the geese return north to Canada. Brown reflects "That's funny because I'm from Texas, and to me the honking of geese always means it's autumn, and the birds are flying south for the winter. It's strange for me to hear geese in the Spring time, and it's strange that a sound can signify two seasons as far apart as Spring and Fall, and two sets of feelings as distant and different as the way you feel in October, and in April". (Brown, "Confederation park") It is important to me to maintain an

anecdotal nature in the body of work. After considerable introspection, I believe that I have succeeded in truly sharing myself and my experiences through my work.

In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols defines a set of models and modes that help to characterize documentary styles. This is a helpful tool in exploring the construction of my work. Nichols defines the models as “preexisting non-fiction models that have been developed over the history of documentary filmmaking, and are styles that preexist the film medium, that are utilized to host non-fiction discourse.” (Nichols) Working from several of these models, I cultivate a structure in my work that allows me to more effectively explore the subject of nostalgia in the moving image. My film is fundamentally based on the “First Person Essay” model. This film is a personal account of the filmmaking experience and representations of nostalgia. Two other of the models are subtly exemplified in my work. My film conveys the individuality of the environments I’m capturing, mostly unique qualities, but also the inherent connection to familiar places that one can project on a foreign place. This characteristic is defined by the “Exploration/Travel Writing” model. Each activity in the field is meticulously journaled. These notes comprise the majority of the content for the essay narration as is routine in the “Diary/Journal” model. Nichols continues, defining the modes as “cinematic qualities, the arrangement of sound and image. They help define the style and mood of the documentary”. The choice of these modes delineates the cinematic expression in the work. The film will stress visual and acoustic rhythm, patterns, and the overall form of itself, patterns inherent to the “Poetic” mode, which the predominant identifier of the film. The “Observational” and “Reflexive” modes are demonstrated in the specific role that I play as the filmmaker. The camera looks on as social

actors go about their lives as if the camera was not present; the film will call attention to the conventions of filmmaking, its creator, and the act by which it is created, respectively. These terms build a solid foundation upon which I create the patchwork of a cinematic experience.

(Nichols)

Screening List

Confederation Park. Dir. Bill Brown. S.n., 1999.

Drifting. Dir. Malic Amalya. 2009.

Here is Everything. Dir. Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby. 2013.

Hiroshima Mon Amour. Dir. Alain Renais. Home Vision Entertainment, 2003.

Hub City. Dir. Bill Brown. S.n., 1996.

La Jetée. Dir. Chris Marker. The Criterion Collection, 1963. DVD.

Nostalgia. Dir. Hollis Frampton. 1971.

Poem for the Past. Dir. Joel Schlemowitz. Film-makers' Cooperative, 1993. DVD.

The Reflecting Pool. Dir. Bill Viola. 1979.

Roswell. Dir. Bill Brown. S.n., 1994.

Sans Soleil. Dir. Chris Marker. New Yorker Video, 1993.

Scarlet Droppings. Dir. George Kuchar. 1991. DVD.

Sun Song. Dir. Joel Wanek. 2013. DVD.

The Tree of Life. Dir. Terrence Mallick. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2011.

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CHAPTER 2: EVIDENCE OF PRODUCTION LITERACY

Essay Film Practice

Setting out to create an essay film is setting out to experience things. The goal is not only to gather images, but even more so to mine anecdotes, characters, scenarios, and landscapes. The mindset of the essay filmmaker is keenness to observe and analyze the environment that she is concurrently documenting and encountering. Through its duration, the narrative is simultaneously hypothesizing, experimenting, and proving or disproving the theories it presents. The images tell one objective story and the narrative a separate, subjective collection of the filmmaker's stories and theories. Each image has a varying association with the concurrent narrative, and is mostly "images for mental notations" (Rascaroli, 27). The intrinsic accessibility and adaptability of the personal essay form naturally adheres to the restrictions of the micro-budget paradigm. It requires minimalism and relies solely on the eye, and the voice of the filmmaker and how eloquently she can express those through merely the camera's composition, spoken essay, and the montage of the two.

The essay film is fully aware of and calls attention to the act by which it is created. This reflexivity of the essay film serves to further elaborate on the idea that impressions are recorded, to be continuously assessed by the conscious mind. It further suggests that there are many ways in which a person may chronicle certain, impressionable experiences. The film both observes and transposes into the narrative an objective act of filmmaking, and annotates its own creator's process. In an article titled *In Search of the Centaur*, Phillip Lopate states that "one of the natural subjects for personal essay-films is movie making itself, since it is often what the filmmaker

knows and cares about most” (Lopate, 257). A natural course of filmmaking is to use its product as “research” (Lopate, 257) for further filmmaking.

I have affectionately named my production process “the one-woman band”. Employing this method means that I must play all of the key roles that form a traditional crew. I am the writer, producer, director, cinematographer, sound recordist, and editor, which allows me complete and exclusive control of every facet of the project, creating a very rewarding and introspective filmmaking experience. It also cultivates immediacy between myself and the subject and process. In this method of production, streamlining and efficiency are the primary focus when making decisions regarding production logistics. The essay film is an important liaison between the fine art aesthetic, and those that can be tied to the experiences of the everyday. This aesthetic focuses and thrives on the banality of corporeal existence, but represent it in artistic and meticulously composed context. In the process of capturing this, it is important not to impose upon it, therefore, any crew in addition to myself, and any gear that exists independently of my person (i.e. camera accessories, lights, boom mics, and grip hardware) completely disrupts that which I am trying to capture. It is my hope to not disturb, or at least as minimally as possible, any of the events, locations, or subjects that I am recording. My filming consists exclusively of natural and practical lighting. While in the field, any audio recording is single-system, using a small shotgun videomic that mounts to the top of the camera. The majority of the sound that is captured while shooting will be used merely as a reference. I try not to inhibit the conversation that unfolds during recording. Although I rarely use it in the film, these interactions serve as field notes in addition to those that I write in my journal. Most sound

recordings used as part of the sound design for the film will be generated post-image capture.

These production choices are not merely due to logistical restraint; it is also my preference, as an artist, to work alone and minimally. For the entirety of production, I will be the sole crew member, and camera operator. I can operate all of the sound and image capturing devices I have chosen, simultaneously. The solitude of my shooting method allows me to concentrate as much on the observation of what I am filming as I am on the act of filming it.

The decision-making process for locations in this production is chiefly sporadic. For the sake of explanation, I have sorted the locations into four major types. Most locations I stumble upon are completely serendipitous. I make every effort to always have my camera on hand for just such occasions. This is especially true when I travel. Some locations I have visited previously, noted certain visual features that appeal to me, been interested by subject and activities that inhabit it, and designed certain shots within that location. Other locations may be suggested to me by others, and in most cases, would not be scouted before shooting. As stated previously, I make every effort to stay as uninvolved in the locations and their subjects as possible. I am there only to document these experiences, and not to affect them in anyway, and to gain conceptual insight from them. In the hopes of capturing as genuine a documentation of life as possible, one of the steadfast rules of my production model is to never change the appearance and assemblage of a location or to direct in any way the subjects that I record.

The camera is the tool by which my memory is captured and made tangible; the objective eye that assigns some sense of tangibility to my subjectivity, as the filmmaker. The camera becomes a part of the filmmaker's surroundings; performing its own rituals of observation, it is

part of the history of the place the filmmaker is in. The camera I use must be lightweight, as I shoot for hours at a time, the steadiness and coherence of the image rely on my stamina as an operator. It must also be unobtrusive, because of the guerrilla style of filming, and if any interactions with human subjects occur, I need to create as little imposition on them as possible. In shooting this particular project, I used a variety of camera platforms, including the Canon EOS 60D and EOS M, an HD DSLR and mirrorless camera, respectively, the Blackmagic Pocket Camera, and the GoPro Hero 3, both HD camcorders. The GoPro will be used exclusively for shots in and around water, having comparable quality and a native waterproof housing. None of these cameras exceeds 3lbs or a dimension of 6"x 5", including battery and lens. These restrictions on size allow me greater ease in moving in and around locations and subjects.

Moreover, these cameras create an important connection for me to the first personal film and video cameras that irrevocably changed the philosophy Avant-Garde filmmaking and video art, and the context of both in the history of fine art. "In a medium heavily dependent on technology, these changes ultimately become aesthetic changes...The aesthetic changes in video, irrevocably ties to changes in its technology, consequently evolved at an equally accelerated pace." (Sturken, p.103) In many ways, the evolution of the 16mm and Super 16mm cameras was shaped to the demands of documentary, and similar types of, filmmaking, which was begging for lightweight and agronomical, and they have been a steadfast partner in the documentary movement. The relationship of the Sony Porta Pak to the video art movement is similar. In this context, and given the nature and editing of the essay film, I find that is perfectly acceptable to me to cut between cameras with distinct aesthetics within the montage of the film.

In addition to the camera, many choices must be made about the support and accessories that have direct aesthetic and logistic implications. The use of zoom lens is imperative, as I have no way of predicting what compositional situation I may find myself in, and switching between fixed focus prime lenses would consume too much time and would be cumbersome. I also take advantage of the telephoto nature of zoom lenses, easily shifting between deep and shallow focus. When I am compelled to highlight a particular point in an image I can use shallow focus, and when I require the entirety of the information presented in a frame I can use deep focus.

Handheld is the primary mode of camera operation because of its aesthetic, philosophical, and practical appeal. I may need to follow certain subjects, move in and out of a location, or any other various actions that may occur during one roll of the camera. Handheld also presents the smallest footprint on the subjects and location, as is the most inconspicuous. Aesthetically handheld is preferred as it calls attention to the way in which our bodies move through space. For the majority of shooting, I found myself simply holding the camera, without the use of a camera support rig. I quickly grew accustomed to this method as the camera began to feel more like an extension of myself than an independent instrument. Instead of using a tripod I used the objects around me; fences, walls, trees, ledges, the ground. I enjoyed the sensation of being physically connected to what and how I was shooting. The small amounts of static and stabilized shots are important to balance the visual rhythm of the film. The constant jaggedness of handholding can cause fatigue in the viewing experience.

The subjective voice over is the pillar feature of my filmmaking process. As opposed to the visual component, the audio, particularly the essay narration, is somewhat Eisensteinian in

nature, as it specifically directs the attention of the audience into understanding meanings regarding the subject of the film, in this case nostalgia. As mentioned above, not only am I gathering images, but I am also gathering my own observations, as if the act of recording the image is analogous to journaling in one's diary. I dedicated a small notebook to the project that will act as artist/production diary, dream journal, and random thought recorder; this notebook will stay on my person at all times. These are the entries that I will use later, in editing, to assemble the patchwork of image and thought. This notebook becomes essential as I begin venturing out into the field to shoot. Many of the events I record and, also, the solitude of recording them inspires thoughts that will become a part of my final essay. In some cases, a particular image that I am composing will have a specific note attached to it, which will be accounted for later in editing. Once the editing process begins I will simultaneously begin to compile the various bits and bobs from the notebook into a more refined essay form and assemble the images. In some cases, the images will be chosen based on thoughts that have already been written, and in other cases thoughts will be created based on images that have been chosen.

Because the essay film relies so heavily on introspection and the articulation of theory through means of the spoken word, it presents as a very flexible filmmaking venture. When mixing such disparate illustrations such as the visual and aural components of the essay film, the balance of this information becomes paramount in shaping the experience and connection of the viewer. The kind of connection I'm working toward is that which can only be provided by such a private, personal method of filmmaking.

Post Production Workflow

It is important to note here that the current iteration of *A List of Things that Quicken the Heart*, in conjunction with installations, is exclusively a digital component. Moving forward, I am creating an alternate, single channel version that will amalgamate the existing digital component with a film component and expansion of the essay. This section addresses both iterations.

Capture

For the purposes of this project, the capture of image and sound function as a metaphorical, visual representation of my personal experience in creating and recalling memories. The incorporation of both film and digital images articulate an overarching formal theme of a philosophy of light capture, as it varies between mediums, and as it relates to the process of memory. Audio capture is comprised of both stereo and binaural sounds providing the best opportunity for auditory movement. In choosing devices for both image and sound recording priority is given to logistical ease, and in relating to the irregularity of visual memory, image consistency is not of considerable importance.

The formal thread of this film explores the relationship between the image capture device and the photons that it captures. In the quest for image capture, the primary motivation is to explore the medium beyond the boundaries of its traditionally representational function so that it is “beautifully untethered from any responsibility to portray reality” (Ramey).

For the digital element of the project, the cameras utilized are, primarily, the Canon EOS M, and Canon 60D, and also, in a few instances, the Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera. In the EOS format h.264 images are recorded in a custom neutral picture style. The Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera was configured to record ProRes images in the “Film” mode. Both image profiles produce a relatively flat picture, and are a compromise between compression, for cost and time efficiency, logistical ease of use, and substantial enough information to suffice for the limited amount of color grading intended. All digital footage was shot at 24fps and 1/50 shutter, because I love cinema.

The film elements of the project are a blend of super 8mm and 16mm footage, and hand painted and collaged 16mm leader. The super 8mm is an assortment of expired stocks. The super 16mm material is shot on Kodak 7266 Tri-X Reversal black and white stock that will later be hand colored. An extension of the capture process for the film footage is establishing a digital intermediate sub-workflow. Due to time and budget restraints, I have a choice between SD telecine or to record the projection of the film onto a screen using an HD camera. The digital portion of the film is edited first as a looping component of the installation exhibition. Upon completion of the manual additive process, the film will be telecined and edited into the preexisting portion digitally.

The capture of light is inherently different between film and video. A digital sensor reads the light emitted through the lens and translates them linearly into an electrically written code that is regenerated, based on that numeric information, by each device that reads it. The photochemical processes of film dictate that the light photons are actually molding and

transforming the silver halide crystal suspended in the emulsion. The values of the light are captured logarithmically, a method more attuned to the human eye. The original light energy reflected off of the subject, into the lens, still remains in the latent film image. By choosing reversal film, instead of negative, I maintain the original silver atoms and photons until they are projected and captured by a digital sensor in the telecine process. Finally, the collaging of objects and application of color pigment directly onto film preserves the truest representation of the subject as light is shown through it, and not merely reflected. In this particular application of the medium, however, even this light is digitally intermediated, and the separation of numerical translation exists equitably between all types of footage.

The objective for sound capture for this project is to amass the raw materials necessary to craft an auditory environment. Similarly, to the montage of image, the ambient soundscape of this film will be an amalgamation of field sound, foley, and handmade noise. All voice-over and ambience is either recorded or post-converted surround or binaural sound. The heart of the audio is the voice over narration, which is recorded in a studio environment to achieve the most pristine recording possible. This allows for a lot of experimentation with post sound effects.

I'm interested in binaural audio for the ambient soundtrack because of the form's invitation of environmental sound into the recording. As opposed to traditional cinematic sound recording, which aims to eliminate this kind of interference, a binaural recording rig allows space for it. This kind of sound recording, especially when heard through headphones, is the most naturally familiar to the human ear. Both the binaural and stereo sound recordings will be mixed down into a surround soundtrack, with the aim of creating auditory movement in the ambient

soundtrack that can be used as a tool to help direct vision through the images on screen and the installations when exhibited together. The selection of images and sounds to be documented is one based on a philosophy for a figurative materialization of memories. They are subject to the meandering capture practices of the essay documentary.

Assembly

When discussing the assembly phase of the essay film, I believe it is important to dissect it into visual and auditory, the two must develop very unique functions in order to harmoniously complement in the final iteration of the film. As opposed to traditional means of production, where the bulk of the narrative and structural choices are made in advance of shooting, these actions occur simultaneously when conceiving, shooting, and editing the essay film. I edit my projects in chapters, meaning I assemble the image and the essay in movements. Once each part feels complete, I put them together and add any images and/or narration to smooth over the transitions. The foundation of the visual element of the film is the implicit contextualization of disparate images and subjects. It is the means by which the audience is led to draw connections, but in no way, reveals specific inferences. As the assembly of images takes place, so too does the assembly of theoretical and observational threads in the essay narration. The theoretical thread of the work is built upon an amalgamation of subjective facts that are particular to my experiences with the conception of memories and the way in which I represent them with visual media. In some cases, the images are chosen based on thoughts that have already been written, and in other cases thoughts are created based on images that have been chosen. As opposed to the visual component of the film, the essay narration specifically directs the attention of the audience into

understanding meanings regarding the subject of the film, in this case memory. In editing the image sequence with the voice-over, it is crucial to maintain a balance of information. The editorial rhythm must be such that the viewer is allowed brief pauses in the flow of information to meditate on the subject.

When I feel that I have accumulated an acceptable amount and range of footage, both film and digital, to properly articulate the theme of the film, I begin to review the raw data and assemble footage. In the first movement of the cut, the most chaotic, images are fragmented, repeated, and superimposed on each other. To achieve this, I began by sifting through all the footage I had accumulated, which was comprised, to my initial dismay of almost exclusively landscapes, and throwing anything of visual interest to me on the timeline in no particular order; the visual theme quickly became apparent.

In considering the overall arc of the assembly, I had to keep in mind that, not only am I exhibiting in a gallery space and the film will be on a loop, I will ultimately be combining several film and video media. Therefore, I have to create a thread through the different media, and the tail and head of the digital component must meet coherently. I began by furiously chopping the clips apart and redistributing them on the timeline without any sort of method. At a point where I had an interesting assemblage, I began to pare it down, cover empty space, and fine tune the rhythm. In the second movement, I use the same method as the first, but I narrowed my clip selections to three specific landscapes I had shot. I would begin one landscape with fragmented images and move slowly into more static and coherent vision of the place, then to the next landscape, starting over with fragments, and so on with all three consecutively. The third

movement is more fluid, switching back to juxtaposed, individual locations, but assembling them in a way so that one is somehow visually similar to the next. The fourth movement continues and accentuates the fluidity of the third, melting into long tracking shots, that are made even more dreamlike with warp stabilization.

Once the visual component is soft picture locked, I record the narration. I work only with an ADR booth recording for narration. In this project, I found that the sequence in which I had written and recorded the narration was ultimately not what best matched the picture. To develop a new sequence, I watched the picture cut again and again, and dropped clips of the narration, which I was very familiar with, in places where I felt they needed to be until I had used everything that I recorded. Moving forward, I intend to write more material, as feel I have not yet exhausted the discourse, and rerecord the narration. Once the rough narration was in place, I began working with the camera sound. Due to the chaotic nature of the picture cutting process, the clip sound had become jumbled and out of sync with the images, which was a serendipitous discovery. The sounds have a disjointed, haunting quality. I left the sounds where they were and just emphasized them with volume in certain places. After locking camera sound, I began working with ambient sounds, by creating two separate tracks for high-mid frequencies and low frequencies, and treating their assembly as though it was a score. The final step in the process is adding sound effects to direct visual attention.

Finishing

Regarding the color grading of this film, I prioritized the specific attributes of each type of footage, and in no way attempt to hide their inherent differences. “A corollary to the breadth

of options opened by digital grading is the need to develop conventions and schemata for channeling the new technology". (Higgins, p.61) The essay form is, at its heart, reflexive, and explicitly references the act by which it is created. This project uses the artifice as a metaphor for the formation and recollection of memory, the limitation in image capture by the camera I'm using is not only a logistical choice, but more notably an aesthetic one. I intend for the images to be noisy, banded, and not true to the real color of things. I use color grading merely as a subtle guide through the visual rhythm of the film.

In accordance with the movement of the theme of identifying memory visualization, I gradually build on how heavily the color is manipulated, so that by the end, the colors are so saturated they are hyperreal. Images appear differently later in sequence than they do at the beginning, the degradation serves as an analogue of the progression of time. A variety of landscapes constitutes the majority of the images; each is manipulated to have a subtle, but clear unique color tone. The viewer should feel the change and place, but doesn't necessarily have to be cognizant of it. The color tones are chosen based on my specific mnemonic experience in those places.

The majority of the digital footage is shot linearly, thus, there is not much latitude for manipulation of the image. Everything in the first movement of the film is linear; this movement receives only a normalization pass. The second movement, of the same footage, receives normalization and gamma passes. The linear footage of the last two movements receives those same normalization and gamma passes, and additionally receives increasingly predominant primary adjustment pass, including tint, saturation, color temp, and contrast modifications. The

third and fourth movements contain several clips of logarithmic footage; these receive independent normalization, gamma, and primary adjustment passes. I have not yet made a decision what telecine method I will use, and if I will ultimately project the super 8mm, and 16mm footage on film for the final exhibition. In any case, I am not intending on manipulating the digital intermediate.

As mentioned, I am making my initial sound design mix in stereo, and then experimenting with a 5.1 surround mix for gallery exhibition. A large portion of my design utilizes low frequency atmospheric sound, and I am interested in how this kind of sound is capable of moving around a gallery space, and through other pieces, and how it affects the overall experience of the collective work.

Essay Film Transcription

I set out to find a list of universal memories. Things that anyone could look at and identify with. I could find no such thing. I ended up just thinking of you.

For some reason, you were the only memory that came to mind.

I can show you the spaces, and the objects, and the people that make who I am now, because I'm sure you've lost the memories of it. You don't remember anything about me.

But I don't know if you'd ever hear it.

Besides I don't even know if it would work.

Did you know that everybody has different perceptions of colors? And depending on what we've looked at, we see different shades of the colors. So my blue and your blue are totally different blues.

You might see the blue of a clear day, and I might see the blue of the ocean.

I think that memory is more powerful and capable of stirring raw, visceral emotions when it's in fractured flickers than as a solid, whole vision.

Sometimes when I think of you I only allow tiny moments before trying to suppress the thought. I guess I'm trying to protect myself from the emotional damage.

I wish I knew where you were.

I don't even know who you are now, but I'm pretty certain you wouldn't remember me.

I know the details are starting to slip away from me, and I'm the one that stayed behind.

A lot has changed since we've last seen each other. I wish that could tell you all the things that I did, that places I've been.

All these images are carefully or not so carefully selected and placed in front of you. These images aren't exactly what my memories of these places look like.

And maybe you were there; maybe you saw them with me.

If I were a painter they would be more similar, but then again probably not.

No one in the family owned a video camera at any point in my childhood; these tangible elements of memory are absent for me.

I'm sure that you remembered them well.

I wish that I could ask you about them.

Someone once told me that when orange trees are dying, they produce more fruit than they ever would.

I guess it's some sort of last attempt.

I wish that I could say the same about us, but you left quietly without warning, and I wasn't there to see you off.

Most of the time I can't think about anything else but leaving this place.

But every so often, the thought of it breaks my heart.

So I before I lose it I want to tell you the story of us, or at least how I remember it:

We often went on walks in the woods together. At first I was afraid to enter. The forest was unknown and unpredictable. But then you told me about the whippoorwill that lived there. And

that the only way she would sing is if I went in with you. There were many twilight hours spent listening to her song.

We walked along the path where a low brick wall accompanied part way through. I was never sure what that wall was supposed to keep out, or in, because even though I was small, I could reach the top of it very easily. I walked along the wall like a balance beam, with a concentrated steadiness. And you would walk beside me and hold my hand. Even when I made the big jump after running out of wall, you never let go.

As we walked you were constantly teaching me things. How to remember the calls of the birds, the shapes of leaves, and smells of the flowers. You saw all the bugs and you knew their names. You found the treasures that no one else knew to identify as such. You passed your compassion for them on to me.

Your grace and gentleness danced unceasingly before you. I always admired that most about you.

At the end of the path was a small lake. It had the warm tannic glow that was an all too familiar trait of the waters of my childhood. We walked as far as the mud could hold us, and we would look through our reflections at the minnows and the tadpoles that swam beneath. All the while I could hear the whippoorwill calling, her distance, never changing, helping us remember the way home.

As time went on, our walks in the woods become more infrequent. But you never grew impatient and the path never changed.

Once I came to the trailhead, but you weren't there. After a while I went in because I was sure you'd be waiting for me. I could hear the whippoorwill but her song had grown faint and it was hard to remember the way alone. I felt the fear I once knew creeping back in.

You weren't waiting for me at the wall. I walked along running my fingers over its course surface. As I walked I recited to myself the names of the plants and the trees, and the bird calls. I knew them all by heart now. I looked to the bugs for clues.

When I finally reached the lake I still couldn't find you. I stayed for a long time watching the fish dart in and out of my shadow, listening for your footsteps behind me.

At some point it occurred to me that the whippoorwill's cry had grown even fainter. So I turned home and wandered my way back.

I repeated this for many days. I waited for you at the lake every time, until the last of the light remained.

I decided to go one last time. On this particular walk I climbed the wall. I did not stumble though I could hardly hear the whippoorwill, and you weren't holding my hand.

When I reached the lake I saw you across in the tree line. You looked much different. I'd hardly have recognized you if not for the place. I could see you were speaking but your voice did not carry over the water. We studied each other for some time before you reached out to me. Your hand stretched impossibly far across the lake. When our grasps met I noticed that your hand

remained unchanged, they possessed all the same warmth they always had. You did not speak, but I told you what I needed to, and you smiled peacefully.

The next night I did not find you at the wall or across the lake. As I walked out of the woods I didn't hear the whippoorwill, and I haven't since.

I can't remember the first time I felt rain,

Or the first time I recognized the smell of a flower,

Or the first I comprehended the finality of death,

Or the first time I was overwhelmed by the beauty of nature.

All of these things are just a part of me now. No more particular or individual than a drop of blood or and flicker of light.

Memories are light.

They are solids, and liquid, and breath.

Memories are voices, and space, and sensations.

It is matter no longer substantiated.

Memory is light.

Can you remember the feeling of grass against your skin and through your fingers, still damp with the tears of early morning?

The sunshine grazing your cheeks,

And the sharp breaths of cold air,

And the azure blue of the cloudless sky,

And the deep rose of the light through your eyelids?

The earthy smell,

And the overheard whispers of insects,

And the hymns of far off birds?

Do you still have those things where you are?

Expanded Cinema Practice

In addition to the essay film, I have expanded my practice to include film and video installations. The series approaches the visualization of memory and the catharsis of the loss felt from death. It explores the balance between the corporeal body and the preservation of memory.

Found organic materials are taped to 16mm clear leader and are projected through. The projection of light through and onto organic material, including entomological and botanic specimens imbues motion in the dead. It also mimics the projection of memory as a means to return to what has been lost.

The term installation suggests that an artist must actually come and install the elements, including electronic components in the case of video, in a designated space. The process of installing suggests a temporary occupation of space, a bracketed existence enclosed by an equal assembling and breaking down. This implies a kind of art that is ephemeral; it is never to be severed from the subject, time, and place of its creation. Conversely, the aura that is supplied with traditional art objects is derived from the separation of such things. The relationship to process, and the "here and now" is what makes video installation so difficult to commodify and also to document. In the conversion to two-dimensional visualization you lose the "space-in-between", that is the three-dimensional construction of a passage for bodies in space and time, which is the most crucial element of the art form. (Morse, p.4) Video art stands out from the broader media culture because of its associations with the histories of both fine art and the cinema. The embracing of the 16mm projector in the presentation of the installation, and the unconventional projection surface, represent an attempt to embody the mechanical process of memory.



Figure 1: Still of installation *Untitled #1*.



Figure 2: Still of installation *Untitled #2*.



Figure 3: Still of installation *Untitled #3*.



Figure 4: Still of installation *Untitled #4*.



Figure 5: Still of installation *Untitled #5*.

Integrating a Body of Work for Exhibition

In considering exhibition, it is necessary to produce two separate mix downs of the essay film. The first, a single channel video, is intended for traditional theatrical exhibition, with a standard stereo sound mix. The second is intended for use in a multi-image and audio channel collection of installations. The essay film is the heart of space, surrounded by five other silent video and film installations. The image is projected on a single screen that is suspended at the head of the space, playing in a continuous loop. Medium to high frequency ambience plays from the left, center, and right speakers, located around the screen. The narration and low frequency ambience dance around the left and right, and the surround speakers located around the entire space.

"Some installations jam habitual modes of sensorimotor experience, others operate at a more contemplative level, depending on the passage of images or conceptual fields through various dimensions, rather than the passage of the body of a visitor through the installation. Yet, even then, the visitor is enclosed within an envelope of images, textures, and sounds." (Morse, p.5)

In all, I wish to create an innovative artistic work in which the experiential consciousness of the viewer drifts between the montage of images, the omniscient narrative, and the animation of the installations. Each viewer creates their own, unique experience, and will see more intricate and diverse connections within the body of work upon each subsequent encounter. The interpretation is evolved by variations in shifts of attention between visual and audio stimulants.



Figure 6: A still from the project's final exhibition.

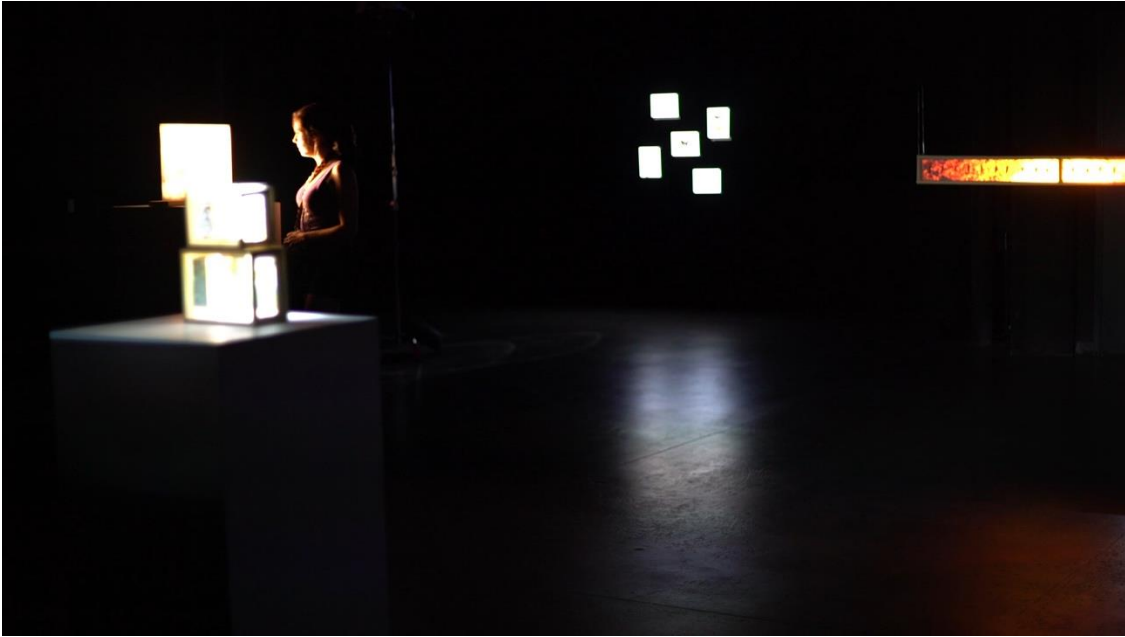


Figure 7: Viewer interacting with the exhibition space.

Video documentation of the exhibition can be viewed at the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/220877865>

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CHAPTER 3: EVIDENCE OF FINANCIAL LITERACY

Subsidized, No-Budget Production

I have reiterated several times previously that a focus on a small footprint, low budget art making is the foundation of practice. In my filmmaking practice, I use minimal gear, and for the thesis work, my production is subsidized by the availability of high quality production equipment and facilities at no charge through my enrollment in the Entrepreneurial Digital Cinema M.F.A track. What is not subsidized I paid for out of pocket, I am using my skills as a freelance camera technician to earn money on the side for my project. The following is a final budget for the project, including the video production and installations, marketing, and exhibition. I have assessed approximate values according to market research that provide a fair estimation of what I would have spent had I produced this work outside the program's support. The ratio of my out of pocket expenditure to the estimated value of "in kind" subsidy from the film program is skewed.

A List of Things that Quicken the Heart Detail Budget					
Item	Vendor	Expense Type	Cost / Unit	# of Units	Total Cost
Installations					
Asst. Constr. Materials	Home Depot	Out of Pocket	--	--	\$ 90.00
Projection Material	Amazon	Out of Pocket	\$ 8.99	5.00	\$ 44.95
Ready Mades	Michael's	Out of Pocket	--	--	\$ 45.00
Film Materials	Urbanski	Out of Pocket	--	--	\$ 68.93
Asst. Art Supplies	Sam Flax	Out of Pocket	--	--	\$ 50.00
Studio Rental	UCF SVAD	In Kind	\$ 150.00	24.00	\$ 3,600.00
Total Cost of Installations					\$ 3,898.88
Essay Film Production					
Media Storage	G-Drive	Out of Pocket	\$ 159.98	2.00	\$ 319.96
Editing Software	Adobe	Out of Pocket	\$ 19.99	16.00	\$ 319.84
Video Equipment Rental	Film Operations	In Kind	--	--	\$ 650.00
Total Cost of Essay Film Production					\$ 1,289.80
Exhibition					
Asst. Install Materials	Home Depot	Out of Pocket	--	--	\$ 68.24
A/V Equipment Rental	UCF Art Gallery	In Kind	\$ 600.00	7.00	\$ 4,200.00
Sound Stage Rental	CEM Studio 500	In Kind	\$ 700.00	8.00	\$ 5,600.00
Stage Equipment Rental	CEM Studio 500	In Kind	\$ 200.00	8.00	\$ 1,600.00
Total Cost of Exhibition					\$ 11,468.24
Marketing					
Web Hosting	Wix	Out of Pocket	\$ 4.99	12.00	\$ 59.88
Domain Fee		Out of Pocket	\$ 10.98	2.00	\$ 21.96
Total Cost of Marketing					\$ 81.84
Total Out of Pocket Cost					\$ 1,088.76
Total In Kind Value					\$ 15,650.00
Total Cost of Project					\$ 16,738.76

Figure 8: Final detail budget for the project.

Another important element of my studio practice is the use of found objects. This is central to both the philosophical and practical aspects of my installations. I have trained my eye to detect potential materials everywhere I go.

Marketing Plan: Developing a Personal

Marketing the body of work that I have created for my M.F.A. is fundamentally different than the indie-based, guerilla marketing plans that were taught to and adopted by my cohorts producing customary, theatrically exhibited, feature length films. In considering strategies, the best course of action seems to be promoting myself as an artist as opposed to individual pieces of work. Additionally, my skill base in the field is diverse, as I am not only a filmmaker and studio artist, but also I work professionally in the camera department. Ultimately, I am refining all of these skills to become a more desirable candidate in the field of academia. Over the course of my thesis work I have put considerable effort into participating in both the art and industry communities in Central Florida. I established a social media presence primarily through Instagram and Facebook, and have also developed and launched a website. This site works as an all-encompassing portal where anyone can access documentation of my creative and professional work.

My target audience can be divided into two main types of people. The first are artists and art enthusiasts. Particularly those interested in emerging female artists, dealing with the relationship between memory and visual media Also, those who are interested in expanded cinema, multimedia artwork the representation of the Florida landscape/experience through visual media. The second group is DIY and vintage enthusiasts. Particularly those interested in DIY art process, expanded cinema, handmade merchandise, and who are lovers of nostalgia. Those of the two groups who are located in central Florida, expanding to the southeast region,

who have a love of the place are likely the most inclined to be captivated by my work. My work is what ties these diverse groups of people together.

My mission in developing my thesis project, primarily, is to amass a body of work for my portfolio. As an experimental film artist, I am very much interested in creating a stream of consciousness representing my approach to comprehending the world physically, spatially, and philosophically. My works include multimedia elements ranging from handmade film loops, found organic materials, DIY projection techniques, and digital video. At the conclusion of my graduate education and artmaking I will hold at least one solo exhibition in the Orlando area, serving the purpose of boosting my resume/CV, exposing my work to the central Florida community, provide an opportunity for feedback and critique on the work, and foster relationships with galleries and artists in the area.

CHAPTER 4: POSTMORTEM

In the initial conceptualization of the theme in the work, I had two primary goals: The first was to attempt to repair what was broken in me after suddenly losing someone very close to me. The second was to establish a montage of images and observations that could somehow be universally relevant to the human experience of memory. There are many ways in which my theories, beliefs, and ideas regarding the subject of memory and loss changed over the course of creating this body of work, the most paramount of these being the universality of memory.

Delving into the task that I had set myself, amassing a collective visual experience, I realized very quickly that my scope was much too large, and rapidly became insurmountable. It was audacious of me to assume that there was such a thing, especially having seen so little of the world, and the cultures and diverse human experiences there within. I succeeded in the exact opposite way that I had initially intended in that I had proven to myself just how little I knew, how relatively small and insignificant my experience was, and that I had to approach the subject conversely. Instead of ascertaining what a universal experience and memory could be as a means to connect to the human experience and subsequently find some respite from the grief I was feeling, I needed to first confront the grief. In doing so genuinely and openly, I embraced inherited artifacts, and stories, and wove them into the landscapes I was currently encountering.

In the recent experience of publicly exhibiting the body of work, I found that most viewers were able to make an emotional connection to my experience through it. By focusing inward and emulating my own memories through my image making and art practice, I created an arena in which viewers were naturally inclined to engage with my subjective representation of

memory. Though the pieces may not have resembled what any particular person visualizes in their own nostalgia and recollections, my candor in doing so tangibly gave them the space to contemplate it.

Ultimately, I believe that I made the work as a way to capture a fleeting connection to a loved one that had gone. Initially, I found solace in my practice because it gave me a reason to still think of her, because working with my memories and things of hers meant that I wasn't forgetting. I discovered at the core of my grief was the fear of losing the details of the relationship. The greatest success of the work was that, as a cohesive body, it created a kinetic memoir that eased the anguish of impermanence.