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What You See is What You Get

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Kevin Kempisty entitled What You See is What You Get.
We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts.

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WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Visual and Performing Arts

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

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Of

Master of Fine Arts

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By

Kevin Kempisty

ABSTRACT

This thesis statement describes and comments on the four videos that compose my thesis exhibition, "What you See is What You Get." Together, they constitute a self-portrait. Videos require multiple mediums and software, each with their own purpose and aesthetic. The three key ingredients these four videos make use of are recorded performances, 2D animation and narrative. This statement will detail the visuals and purpose of each one, the technology and editing process, and the inspirations that have led to the thesis exhibition.

The statement describes the choice of color, movement and rhythm to carry the narrative, which is not based chronologically but emotionally. Finally, some attention is given to the tone of the videos and the progression between my past and present self.

The overall theme of these videos is self-exploration. A large part of who I am today comes from my early love of cartoons and video games; from consumer I have become creator. I have learned to apply my skills with AfterEffects, Photoshop, GIMP, Game Maker and iMovie to create content that is revealing of my progress through life.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my teachers and my fellow peers for helping me reach this milestone in my life. I could not have done this alone without guidance.

I am grateful for the students who have helped me open my eyes to a larger world. Through my artistic struggle, I have learned a lot about myself through the guidance of comparing and contrasting our works, and understanding that art styles are meant to be unique from one another.

To my teachers who have helped guide my talent, I give a very special thanks for your encouragement, as well as your blunt criticisms. Without those, I would never have reached this point with as much satisfaction. I am also thankful for your patience in working with me, and I am happy to have grown as an artist through your supervision.

A special mention to all of my artistic inspiration, namely Cory Archangel, who became the first and most important step to encouraging me to pursue the kind of art I had previously been too afraid to create. Without that initial push, this thesis would never have ben possible.

Finally, I am very grateful for the university staff who have taken the time out of their busy lives to assist me in not only creating my thesis, but also help with my statement.

Thank you all for your encouragement!

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis statement describes and comments on my thesis exhibition work, which is composed of four videos, each featuring myself as the main subject. In other words, this thesis is a self-portrait framed in a series of back-to-back multi-medium digital videos. Together, the videos are designed to build an autobiographic narrative, divulging information about myself in various situations.

The exhibition space is a dark, squared room, no more than twenty square feet, located in the 3rd floor gallery of the McLaurin building. While it is impossible to rid the room entirely of noise, viewers can watch the videos with minimal interruption. The darkness serves to help the viewer focus on the images projected on the right side of the room; chairs are placed there, should the viewer want to sit down while doing so. The videos include sound, which is a crucial element in my work; each video has music that relates specifically to the subject matter.

This thesis is the result of a personal evolution. As a young child, I looked up to my brother. I stuck with drawing because he decided to give drawing a try; although he lost interest in it after a while, I continued to draw. I would eventually combine my enthusiasm for drawing with my love for video games and cartoons, and began to create storyboards or children's books of my favorite video game characters. Later, I designed my own characters with their own worlds and personalities, and I learned to animate and design my own video games. After completing the Media Arts degree at the University of South Carolina, I joined the M. F. A. program at Winthrop University. I was excited, but also lost. I struggled to find my identity and my interests as an artist. Finding that I had no interest in physical mediums such as acrylic paint, with the inspiration of Cory Arcangel I found my path in the program by focusing on digital art.

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THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis statement is to offer more information on these videos, which are my personal confessions relating to my hobbies, personality and vulnerabilities. Each aims to give information about emotionally significant aspects of my personality, featuring myself as the main subject. All use a mixture of recorded footage from a camera and 2D animation.

The videos are played in this order: *Showcase Boogy, The World I Only Know, Lonely Paradise,* and *Never Gonna Give You Up.* In *Showcase Boogy*, I show the viewer the general art style I create; I want the viewer to understand the kind of person that I am but mostly who I am as an artist. To do this, I portray myself dancing in a lighthearted way, while the artwork displayed in my clothing depicts previous art projects. In *The World I Only Know,* I show the viewer another key aspect of me, this time as a video gamer, and I indicate how I evolved as such. *Lonely Paradise* gives the viewer an insight into my current life. Finally, *Never Gonna Give You Up* gives them an opportunity to see my vulnerability and my more intimate self.

SHOWCASE BOOGY

The first video in the series, *What You See Is What You Get*, showcases the work I have done throughout my time at Winthrop. It attempts to offer the viewer direct access to both my artistic style and my personality. The format of this video is square, since every visual area is meant to be given equal weight. The objects featured range in size and content, dependent on my personal feelings about them, as will be revealed later in this section. The multiple dancing images of "me" appear in the order of oldest to newest work at the time of the video's completion, with the exception of the children's book featured, which was created much earlier than any other piece in this video.

The sound, which runs through the video, is that of *Retarded Horse*, a satirical

song written by artist El Chombo and released in 2006. Less known as *Chacarron*

Macarron the song pokes fun at the rap genre; most of the lyrics are unintelligible. Like

the song used in *Never Gonna Give You Up*, this is an internet phenomenon whose

rhythm matches the movement of the featured objects. This song is chosen for two main

reasons: the first is that I am highly critical of my own work. Just as the song itself is

critical of the genre it takes part in, so too I make fun of my own creative endeavors. The

second is that no other song worked as well with my dancing style in the video, both

content-wise and rhythmically.

The opening scene is a blue screen with small white dots, simulating stars in the

night sky; they keep appearing in the center of the screen and moving in straight lines and

seemingly random directions towards the edge, only to disappear from sight. This is

intended to evoke the sense of falling from a great height as the stars whizz by.

A figure then emerges from the bottom left-hand corner of the screen, rising

vertically; this represents me. I am wearing predominantly white clothes with flickers of

other colors moving in and out of focus. As this image moves around, the viewer sees

noticeable animation on the clothes, in this case a video of recorded game footage I

designed, named *Bombrades*. The name is a combination of "bomb" and "comrade," as

the game emphasizes the cooperation two players must engage in to survive a series of

bombs falling from the sky. The two players do this by controlling only one character on

the screen, one player moving the character to the left, the other to the right.

At this point of the video, I begin to dance in a seemingly random and entirely

carefree way. Soon after, another much smaller image of myself emerges from the right

side of the screen, this time horizontally; here the contents of the clothes are

predominately grayish and green. Under the clothes runs the video *Joy To The World*, a

stop-motion production that I also designed, in which children silently mouth a song of

the same name in which the lyrics have been changed to acquire a significantly darker twist; children now mention killing their teacher, barbecuing her head, and "flushing her body down the potty." For example, "the Lord is come" in the original lyrics is replaced with "the teacher's dead", followed by "we barbecued her head." Thus potential violence is implicit in the video.

Just as the second self-image begins to dance, a third "me" emerges from the top-left side of the screen, also horizontally. This is a much larger image than the other two, more than twice the size of the second one. Here, the shirt displays a video showing a series of lightly-animated scenes from a children's book that I created using hand-drawn illustrations and special animation programing. *Peppermint Story: The Dream Bear* is its title, and it features PickleBoy, a green character that is very dear to me; it was my original avatar before I started using myself in art pieces directly.

Immediately after this figure begins to dance, a fourth one emerges from the bottom right-most corner of the screen, of about the same size as in *Joy To The World*. On the clothes are projected images showing me playing *Pokémon*, a video game I have played since I was a small child. The fifth figure then emerges from the bottom center of the screen, rising straight upward; the shirt displays footage of a project of mine that involves the design of a video game using the same character as that of *Peppermint Story*. Much of my time and effort have been given to the creation of this game, making sure that it is flawless in terms of both animation quality and gameplay. For this reason, I gave this image center-stage in the video.

Emerging diagonally from the top-right corner of the screen comes the sixth self-image, bearing a series of photographs from a photoshoot I created titled *The Colors of Passion*; this features a nude female model with single-colored paint covering her body, a different color in each photo. To emphasize the color, the entire image is gray-scaled except for the painted areas. Each color gives visual indication of a particular method of

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application: for example, the red paint was clearly placed on the body roughly, while the green paint is smeared everywhere to represent a very intimate interaction. All the paint is made to look like the result of hand application with their implications of the intimacy of someone's touch.

The final self-image emerges horizontally from the middle of the left side of the frame, bearing the footage of one more video game, *Dungeon Façade*. This was the last one I designed during my time as a student at Winthrop University, a two-player game much like *Bombrades* but much more complicated and competitive.

Once all of the self-images are on the screen, the first "me" begins to descend toward the same edge of the screen it came from, as shown in fig. 2. One by one, in the order of appearance, each dancing "me" leaves the screen.

The sizes of the self-images are an indication of my own satisfaction with the projects that can be seen on the clothes. The largest bears the images of *Peppermint Story*. I would go as far as to consider the green character my creative catalyst. He is the guide to the world I want others to explore. In a way, these self-images represent my ego. Personally speaking, there is no greater joy than to watch a world unfold before its creator's eyes, or to witness the viewers enjoying and engaging in a world that would not otherwise exist.

THE WORLD I ONLY KNOW

This piece explores my video game addiction journey from childhood to the present. As a child, I was always obsessed with games, and I have taken my passion from playing them into making them. You could say that it has become a very important aspect of my professional life. This particular video has the unique feature of mixing hand-drawn graphics, voice recording, and live recording.

The video begins with a small, innocent-looking child walking to the rhythm of the background music from the video game *Super Mario Bros. 2*. He is taking his time, walking slowly across a black and white ink-drawn setting, as shown in fig. 3. The area around him, such as the dirt path that he walks on, the blades of grass, and the trees in the background are devoid of color. This character represents my childhood, the 8-bit music revealing the types of games I played.

Black and white symbolize the clean aspect of my personality, the innocence of gaming before I delved deeper into a community of players. Back then, I was only interested in having fun, minding only the game that was in front me. The music is upbeat and catchy.

At some later point, the video shows a fateful encounter with the sea. The threatening character of this experience is first indicated by the disturbance of the once pure-white sky that turns grayer and more cloudy the closer the he gets to the sea, as shown in fig. 4. The purple color of the sea is a symbol of the toxic world of gaming I engaged in when I became older and started playing with thousands, if not millions, of other gamers. The very word "toxic" comes from the gaming community, and refers to gamers who are not fun to deal with, mostly due to how rude they are to other players. Leaving behind every last trace of innocence, the figure in the animation decides to join this community.

The sea is made up of a series of purple-colored spiral shapes, made to simulate waves moving slightly up and down. To further indicate its toxic element, purple-colored bubbles float upward out of the sludge, its toxins frothing on its surface. The figure, not slowing down his pace one bit as he walks along to the beat of the music, moves directly into it. As he wades deeper in, he begins to sink and is eventually engulfed.

The deeper he sinks, the quieter the music becomes. Just before the music fades completely out, a significantly more orchestral musical score starts to come in, with a

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much more serious and diabolical tone. Flashes of white light begin to randomly flicker in and out over the grey skies while the sound of thunderclaps echo over the sea. A figure rises to the surface, its head a straightforward representation of my own. This head, however, is not attached to a human body but to a monster's whose body is large and slug-like, taking on a slimy texture and bloated shape. There are visible spikes lining its back and six black arms. The body is a purple color, representing the stains and influence from the community, but the head remains pure black and white, representing the struggles to maintain its innocence and, by extension, good will, while it resides in its toxic environment.

This scene is followed by a storm. As the lightning strikes across the sky, the figure fills the screen briefly, fading out as lightning reveals the monster in the sea once more. Each time the lightning strikes, the figure is seen quickly fading out as the monster comes up, showing the alternation between myself before and after joining the online gamer community. The flashes of light show me at specific moments in my life, such as when I had bags under my eyes due to lack of sleep from my obsession to create video games. As the video progresses, more lightning booms over the sky, showing the obsession that gripped me to the point that I would forget getting dressed and felt an intense need to absolutely kill everything on the battleground to find rare treasures in the game.

By the time the monster roars loudly three times in succession the tone has changed drastically from happy and innocent to menacing and brutal. Once he finishes his last roar, an enemy monster with the same body shape but a different, non-human head wades onto the right side of the screen, as shown in fig. 5. Roaring while he charges at the challenger, the human-headed monster smashes himself into his opponent, causing the other to sink in defeat. Shortly afterwards, a different opposing monster enters from the left side of the screen. This scene is repeated several times, with different monsters

challenging him in succession; the human-head monster slays them all. The monsters represent both the people who became part of the toxic community and a video game avatar.

The online community is competitive, so clashes between players, both during gameplay and personally, occur often. There is an overwhelming need to be the dominant one in a virtual world, and the human-headed "me" monster tries to defeat other players in order to be the best. When a gamer plays a game, they become immersed in that world. They do not acknowledge their surroundings, instead choosing to place themselves within the world of the game. From a gamer's point of view, they are going on epic quests and fighting all manners of creatures with their swords and their magic. They become the character in the game that they play.

This is, however, not the end of the video. The surface of the toxic sea slowly ascends. The monsters who continue their battle are slowly drowned by the ascending toxic waves. As the sea rises, the bottom, which is not too far from the surface, becomes visible; beyond it, the viewer now sees a laptop with my hands holding a game controller. The surroundings are filled with various toys and dolls, completed with bits of crumpled paper and an empty Starbucks cup lying upon the surface. This setting contrasts drastically from the previous one due to the low sound volume, lack of action and setting contrasts. As this last part of the video nears its end, a sudden rage befalls me in the video: I throw down my controller, grab and throw away action figures and boxes within my grasp, and ultimately punch the screen with my fist, cracking the lens, as shown in fig. 6. My destructive nature becomes visible.

LONELY PARADISE

The piece focuses on an exaggerated scenario of my more recent self, particularly during my time at Winthrop University. I have family members and a significant other living close enough to visit but far enough for the visits to take a substantial amount of my daily life. Unfortunately, the location of my parents and of my significant other are in two directly opposite directions. When the weekend arrives, I make a choice to see one or the other, as I understand neither party has as much opportunity to travel as I do.

When the video begins, the viewer sees an outer space setting with my head in the middle of the screen, adorned with hand-drawn animated cartoon pair of legs and arms. Beneath the head is a very small floating island that the head's feet rest upon, as shown in fig. 7. The island has only a single tree and the surface of the island, as well as the leaves of the tree, are orange. The orange was selected for the tree to help it stand out against the blue background. The tree intimates rest, as someone can lay back against a tree and close their eyes.

The outer space setting represents the area between my two usual destinations. Not far into the film, two hand-drawn planets appear, one green, representing the area my significant other lives, and the other yellow, which represents where my parents live. Both planets simultaneously appear on either side of the screen, one from the upper left-hand corner, the other from the lower right. I think of the cities that the two locations are as planets in comparison to the small island, which is my private abode.

Lonely Paradise seeks to display visually the forces of these two parties as they affect me, but do it in a comical way. I do not dislike the idea of traveling long distances. The small island placed in the middle represents my location when I am visiting neither my parents nor my significant other. Personal space and isolation is the main theme of this tiny island. This is where I return to when my visits are over and I can rest from my adventures and mentally recollect myself.

The two planets emerge from around the borders of the screen, and the arms become stiff and stick up perfectly horizontally. As the two planets move back in the direction that they came from, the arms are pulled away with them, each arm following the closest planet, respectively. As the arms are pulled away, the face begins to stretch slowly horizontally, as shown in fig. 8. Just as the face reaches its limits, the arms whip back to the head and are released from the two opposing planets. The head stops stretching and the arms return to normal size. With a sigh of relief, the head slowly returns to normal size, as Beethoven's *Ode To Joy* plays in the background. The feet then place themselves back on the island. Only moments later, as the two planets return from their original corners, pulling the hands out and stretching the head again, the video ends.

The choice to have Beethoven's *Ode To Joy* playing in the background felt appropriate to the entire situation. Not only is the head finally able to rest after his long travels, but both sides are sufficiently satisfied with the visit. In the end, everything works out better than had I chosen not to endure the trip at all.

<div align="center">

NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP

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In the last video of this series, the viewer is given the opportunity to witness the inner turmoil that resulted from the end of a personal relationship. What seems to be a happy and uplifting theme very soon starts to lose its optimistic nature as the relationship begins to reveal its true nature. It is a sad piece, made even sadder by the lyrics of the song that bears the same name as the piece. In the end, I was left with nothing but depression and darkness, as shown in fig. 11.

My generation treats the song in this video, *Never Gonna Give You*, performed by Rick Astley, as a prank or joke and thus the viewer is invited to watch what seems to be a lighthearted and amusing video, which lends poignancy to the narrative. From beginning to end, the lyrics express someone's commitment to a relationship, someone

who would do anything for the loved one. This is exactly how I felt, but despite my optimism, only sadness ensued. Until I fade into the darkness of gloom, I still figuratively sing the words of love with all my emotion.

In the beginning, the viewer sees a picture of me in the center of a pure white backdrop, my head bobbing to the rhythm of the song, and my arms and legs moving as if the body were dancing in place. Making up my torso area are five individual pieces placed together as in a jigsaw puzzle. In each of the five pieces a video loop plays, each representing a specific trait of myself. Behind my body are five uniquely colored rays of light, each rotating at its own pace, as shown in fig. 9. The light colors were chosen to be bright, vivid, and very distinguishable from the other colors so as to give off a happy and bright atmosphere.

For the duration of the film, my body does not move from the center of the screen. After a short period of time has passed, the viewer notices a single female arm slowly extending from the top left-most edge of the screen. Once the arm reaches one of the five individual pieces, it visibly grabs it and slowly drags it away from the body, as shown in fig. 10. As soon as the piece is dismembered from the main body, one color of rotating rays from behind the body disappears and the video in its entirety subtly slows down; the most noticeable change is that the music tone grows deeper. Slowly, as the video progresses, the background color, once a pure white, fades to a grim dusk.

This process is repeated four more times; each time a different arm from a different edge of the screen extends just far enough to grab one of the remaining pieces of the torso to drag it off the screen. When all the pieces have been ripped away from the body, no more colorful rays of light rotate from behind the body. As the final piece of the torso is dragged away, the head begins to turn upside down until it is left dangling pitifully from its shoulders. Once the body, still standing in the center of the screen, has lost everything but its limbs, arms and legs become limp and the body stops moving

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entirely. In the last few seconds of the video, the music becomes unbearably slow and the body fades away into the gloomy void as the music fades out.

Five separate pieces make up the torso, and five uniquely colored rays of light, each color corresponding to a specific piece. Each represents a specific aspect of my myself. Red, blue, green, yellow and purple are the colors that make up each of the rays of light that rotate from behind the body, each color having a direct correlation with a specific torso piece.

The first arm to begin its pursuit of a torso piece starts from the top left-most edge of the screen. The first piece to be taken, which makes up the left shoulder and chest area of the torso, represents money in its literal form as well as other various resources that could only be bought with money. The image inside that piece is displayed by a music video performed by a group of rappers named "Young Money." As that piece slowly leaves the main body, the green rays of light disappear. Green is the color money is most commonly associated with.

Soon after the first piece is ripped from the torso, the next arm begins to creep its way from the bottom right-most edge of the screen to the next torso piece that makes up the body's left (the viewer's right) hip and stomach area. A soothing campfire is displayed in this next piece. When I think of campfires, I think of safety, warmth, comfort and bonding, much like a group of scouts on a camping trip huddling around a campfire as they deepen their relationships with each other. Hence, this torso piece represents the warmth I offered and selflessly gave away. Once this piece has been ripped from the torso, the red rays of light suddenly disappear, red being the warmest color of the rays of light used in this video.

The third arm begins to crawl its way onto the screen from the bottom left-most edge of the screen, slowly making its way to the torso piece that makes up the body's right (the viewer's left) hip and stomach area. Displayed inside that torso piece is the

ticking of an analogue clock, meant to signify time. Every relationship relies on time to grow, regardless of the relationship status or how it ends. The relationship that this video refers to took up a lot of my own time before it went to waste. When this part of the torso leaves the body, the blue rays of light leave with it, disappearing from the screen. Blue was chosen to represent time due to its ethereal and mystical connotations; time is also ethereal as it cannot be seen, but exists in our minds.

From the top right-most edge of the screen comes the fourth arm, slowly reaching for the body's left (the viewer's right) shoulder area, where lies the fourth torso piece. Inside, a series of trust falls performed by various strangers is displayed. This represents the trust and loyalty I had sworn to my ex-girlfriend before it was shattered. As my trust is taken for granted and dragged away from the body, the purple rays of light disappear from sight. Purple is associated with trust and loyalty in this video for personal reasons, as it was the favorite color of my ex-girlfriend.

The final piece of the torso, placed in the most central part of the body where the heart lies, is the last section. From the bottom center depths of the screen ascends the largest arm, clawing its way to the last piece. The fifth torso piece displays a video of optical illusions and an extreme close-up of the human eye. When the viewer looks upon any art piece displaying any manner of creature, they will automatically search for the eyes. It is simply human nature. As this piece of the torso demands the attention from the viewer, that is also what it represents: attention. As it is the final piece to leave the body, so too is it the final aspect of myself that I gave too much of. As the large feminine arm grabs hold of the central piece, the last yellow ray of light is destroyed, only the impending darkness being left in the background. Yellow represents attention in this video because it is by far the brightest of the colors used for the rays of light.

THE SOFTWARE

Every video was created using various software, namely GIMP, Adobe

AfterEffects and iMovie. On some occasions, other software was required, such as Game

Maker, OBS and Audacity. Each software has its own unique use, some for convenience

and others for their unique features. Each video may have a different visual aesthetic, but

they are all created the same way, using a mixture of still and moving images.

It is important to note that during the editing phase on any given program, a lot of

material is taken away and changed from its original source. For example, take the five

individual pieces that make up the torso of the body in *Never Gonna Give You Up*. Each

was originally from one image file, a photograph of my body. By using image-editing

software, I was able to cut up the image, save each cut piece as its own image file, edit

them as necessary, and then place them back together during the video editing phase.

GIMP

GIMP is an image-editing software that allows the user to manipulate a visual on

a virtual canvas. It is often considered a free alternative to the more powerful Adobe

Photoshop. GIMP is primarily used to edit still images. For example, the body used in

Never Gonna Give You Up, sans the head, is originally a still image. The main purpose of

GIMP is to eliminate any background colors or unwanted visuals from either a photo or a

scanned picture, turning it completely transparent.

Before I put any object in AfterEffects to be animated or used, it is edited in

GIMP in order to make precise changes. Once the still image is changed to suit my needs,

it is saved as an image file that is later imported to the Adobe AfterEffects software for

use. The PNG format works best as it saves the image with its transparencies still intact.

Almost any other file type would render the transparencies as white or black, or make the

image look pixelated. GIMP is only used to edit completely still images, such as a digital

photograph or a scanned hand-drawing, devoid of any animation whatsoever.

ADOBE AFTEREFFECTS

Adobe AfterEffects is an animation and video-editing software that allows the user to piece together multiple media, such as other video or image files, to create one separate video. The objects within the video are organized in layers and work independently from one another, much like a series of props on a theatre stage that stand or move around at different depths. For example, in *Never Gonna Give You Up* the arms that are seen reaching out to grab the torso pieces are layers placed closer to the viewer than any other object's layer; when an arm and another separate object, such as the body, begin taking up the same area, the arm will appear as if it is on top of the body, covering it. This is because the arms are on a layer that is closer to the viewer than the object it is sharing space with, giving the illusion that it is hovering over the lower layers. In a similar fashion, the rays of light that appear behind the body are layers placed further from the viewer than any other object in the video; everything else appears as if it is hovering over the rays of lights.

GAME MAKER

There is one video that uses two more unique programs, one of which is called Game Maker. Even though Game Maker is used primarily to design games, I used it as an alternative method for simple animation. While its animating capabilities are not as flexible as those done in AfterEffects, Game Maker is a far more user-friendly software. In addition, my extensive experience using Game Maker allows me to easily make animations like those of the toxic sea and the monster in *The World I only Know.*

OBS

The other unique tool used in conjunction with Game Maker is a program called Open Broadcasting Software, or OBS for short. OBS is used to record anything I need that is on-screen, such as a window displayed on the laptop's desktop. In this thesis, OBS was used only to record the sequenced animations I programmed in Game Maker for *The World I Only Know*. Once the video is recorded and saved as a compatible video format, it is ported to AfterEffects and iMovie for the final touch.

AUDACITY

When the recorded video is put into either iMovie or AfterEffects, the sound is taken away in favor of intentionally recorded sounds. None of the videos displayed in my thesis use their original sound, instead relying on sound-editing software called Audacity. Audacity is not only able to record sound, but it is also capable of manipulating the recorded sound, such as adding echoes or causing a sound to fade in or out. By implementing these edits, I am able to create the sound appropriate for the atmosphere I want to convey, such as the echoing roar of the monster in *The World I Only Know*. Once the sound recording and editing is complete, it is saved as a compatible file, later to be used in iMovie.

iMOVIE

iMovie is used to make final editing touches once Adobe AfterEffects has been used to create the raw materials of the video. Although the final stage is the most simple, iMovie's use is the most critical stage of the editing process. Once a video made in Adobe AfterEffects is saved as an iMovie-compatible file, it gets imported to iMovie where extra sound effects, voice recording and scene manipulation, such as slowing the

video down in specific areas, are implemented. For example, while editing *Never Gonna Give You Up* in Adobe AfterEffects, the music that plays during the video had not been added yet. Once the video was saved on Adobe AfterEffects and imported to iMovie, a separate music file was added to the video from there. The same occurs for sound effects and voice acting.

HOW DID I END UP HERE?

SELF PORTRAIT

I had originally designed this thesis to be a series of "self-portraits." However, my use of the word "self-portrait" has been challenged. It was pointed out that the characters used in my work were more like *personas*.

It is true that many of the self-portraits from the early Renaissance in the mid-15th century onward were typically a face, sometimes an entire body against a background or setting. In some cases, like with many of Frida Khalo's work, such as *The Two Fridas* (fig. 12) and *The Broken Column* (fig. 13), self-portraits have metaphorical meanings. Photographer Nadar's 1865 *Revolving Self Portrait* (fig. 14) is a series of pictures used as frames to be played as a single moving image. My entire thesis depicts representation and animation, all of which feature me as the primary object. As I see it, I am merely a modern version of an old tradition.

WHY I PUT MYSELF IN MY VIDEOS

The answer to this question is quite simple: I know a lot about myself. Even Frida Khalo admits "I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best" (Mehta).

The main idea behind this series was to divulge information about myself using humorous settings with serious, personal topics. Because of how different each video is in nature, I was told that the series seemed to be more about self-exploration, seeking out my place within the world and finding the answers to who I am. I pondered this idea for a while, but my only conclusion was that this series is not about *discovering* who I am, but rather *acknowledging* who I am.

Humans are vastly more complicated than one could ever define. *Showcase Boogy* describes the pride I have in the work that I create, yet I am not narcissistic. *The World I Only Know* acknowledges the monster I have become by joining a community I can no longer turn away from, but I am not always angry. *Lonely Paradise* and *Never Gonna Give You Up* confirm the fact that I am a dedicated individual to those I care about, for better or for worse, yet I still value my own well-being. I want people to learn about me, and I want people to want to understand both my happier as well as my darker sides, all the while being entertained.

WHY THIS MEDIUM?

Graduating from the University of South Carolina with a Media Arts degree lead to a personally awkward transition into the Master of Fine Arts program at Winthrop University. This was not the school's fault, however. Before I came to Winthrop University I had been going to classes filled with other students who had the same interests as I did. I never questioned the material I created because I *knew* that what I was creating was relevant to my program of study, whether it was designing video games, illustrating pages in a book or even designing comics.

Coming into the Master of Fine Arts away from my comfort zone was very shocking to me. Suddenly, I was surrounded by students who worked on entirely different mediums, none of which were directly related to the things I had done

previously. I felt like an outcast in a world of professionals who had, from my point of view, much more profound and impactful research. My previous work focused on cartoons, video games and children's books, none of which used performance art, acrylic paint or high-definition photography. My inability to accept the kind of artist that I was meant that I struggled greatly to implement my skills in more traditional mediums, such as painting. I later found that I had no interest in this medium, and I was afraid that people might think digital mediums were not acceptable as fine art.

MY INFLUENCES

CORY ARCANGEL

During the struggle to establish who I am, my research eventually led me to a contemporary artist named Cory Arcangel. A post-conceptual artist from New York, Cory Archangel works in many different mediums, including video, music and digital work. Most importantly to me, however, was his use of video game reappropriation, meaning he would take a video game's software and edit the game to fit his needs.

Examples include his edits of the popular game *Super Mario Bros.* He would either erase everything in the game except for the clouds, as he did in his work called *Super Mario Clouds* (fig. 15), or he would create an entire movie using the sounds, fonts and initial programming, such as in his *Super Mario Movie* (fig. 16). Of course, the *Super Mario* games were not the only games he appropriated, but all of them were shown in a gallery using a large projector. This inspiration became the foundation of how I wanted to show my work off, as well as the mediums I wanted to use.

From the time I discovered Cory Arcangel, I began my path leading to the kind of artist I really wanted to be. In researching Cory Arcangel, I read an important quote

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from him in an interview with Petra Heck: "Keep doing what you like to do. That's all it is" (Heck).

JASON ROHRER

Cory Archangel was the turning point in at my time at Winthrop University, but he was not the only influence on my work. Calling video games art is often controversial, even within the community of fellow gamers. I personally will always believe that games are a form of art. In fact, many games are designed intentionally with an emphasis on artistic valve, called "art-games." An example of this would be Jason Rohrer's game *Alt-Play: Jason Rohrer Anthology,* in which he took aspects of his personal life and his concepts of life itself and turned them into a game that took the player on an intellectually stimulating journey.

Games can have a significantly stronger impact on a human being than most people realize. In fact, video games allow a viewer to make choices constantly that will affect their overall experience in a way that is different from what a movie, a book or even a painting can do. *Alt-Play: Jason Rohrer Anthology* is made up of two separate small games, one titled *Passage* and the other *Gravitation*. In *Passage* (fig. 17)*,* the player takes control of an avatar for five minutes, navigating through a series of mazes picking up items that award points. This entire experience is designed to simulate human life in a very short time span. *Gravitation* (fig. 18) features the player taking control of Rohrer's avatar. The game focuses on the relationship with his daughter and how that changes with time; it is about understanding that things change eventually.

Art games were my excuse to design video games for my M.F.A. program. While I do not directly include them in my thesis, they were a very important part of my development as a professional artist. There is no greater joy to me than to watch people genuinely react to a creation by my own hand.

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GARY HILL

When I began to delve back into creating videos, I began to research contemporary videographers and the things they were doing. One particularly interesting videographer was Gary Hill who, like Cory Archangel, made use of projectors to display his works. *Black/White/Text* (fig. 19), *Picture Story* (fig. 20) and *Primarily Speaking* (fig. 21) are three examples of his works that particularly stuck out to me, mostly by their use of color as well as the content of the videos. They were very strange yet they had a conclusive point to make.

Gary Hill utilized what he called "electronic linguistics" in order to create sound, claiming the sounds were emitted in electronic space. In an interview with Lucinda Furlong from *Experimental TV Center*, Gary Hill was asked about the technical aspects of his work and whether they were necessary to a film's success. "You can't sidestep the mechanics of the medium, but it's not what makes something. A whole different shift occurs in putting a work together-materializing it-and perceiving it. If a piece really works for you, your response goes beyond a question about how it was made, though it might come up later as extra information" (Furlong).

DON HERTZFELDT

Another inspiration for the final productions of my thesis, namely for the pieces *The World I Only Know* and *Lonely Paradise*, comes from an online animator named Don Hertzfeldt, best known for his work *Rejected Cartoons, The Meaning of Life* and *The World of Tomorrow*. His videos are often comical and satirical, particularly *Rejected Cartoons* (fig. 22), filled with vulgar, gory and perhaps inappropriate content. All of this disguises an intellectual theme of self-respect and a masterful display of hand-drawn animation, a direct influence to the artistic style of *The World I Only Know*. Both *The*

World of Tomorrow (fig. 23) and *The Meaning of Life* (fig. 24) really inspired me in terms of aesthetic presentation. I found it fascinating that he was able to minimize the art style, focusing not on the characters but the multitudes of massive environments they were traversing in between scenes.

CONCLUSION

During my first semester I created mixed media digital images using photography and digital painting. From there, I created video games as my preferred method of art making. The first game I created in my M.F.A. program was meant for one person to play; afterwards, I started to create games that two people could play at one time, such as the aforementioned games *Bombrades* and *Dungeon Façade.* By recording people's reaction as they played the games, I was able to capture people's true personalities without the need to force their emotions. For a short time I worked with digital photography, making use of my abilities in Adobe Photoshop to create images that focused on color, such as *The Colors of Passion,* as mentioned previously. When I got to the point where I created *Joy To The World*, I knew I wanted to move on to creating videos again, just as I had done as an undergraduate. Making use of the all the skills I had picked up and explored up on, I created my thesis without a second thought.

When I first stepped into the Master of Fine Arts program, I never expected to create the content that I have for my thesis. The work I had created up to this point helped me decide what I wanted to design. By taking a passion from my previous experiences and applying it here, I created my best work at Winthrop University.

When asked what my thesis explores, the answer is not a search for myself through the many different themes, trying to pull them all together to form some cohesive understanding. The answer is a showcase of me knowing exactly who I am. I want people to see the kind of person I am, and not through a conversation, but through visual action.

I want people to know the joy I have put in all of my life's work. I want people to know of my obsession with the gaming world, and the monster that I have partly become because of it. I want people to see the kind of dedication I have towards the different parties associated with me and the amount of effort and pain that goes into it. The only way to reveal information about one's self is to fully understand one's self, to be aware of one's personality and habits, and to be completely okay with that. It is not as easy as it sounds, either.

Fig.1, *Showcase Boogy*

Fig.2, *Showcase Boogy*

Fig.3, *The World I Only Know*

Fig.4 *The World I Only Know*

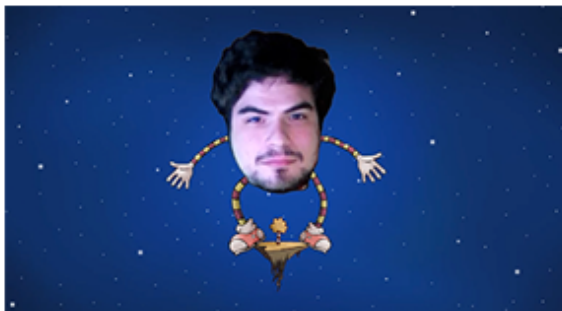Fig.5, *The World I Only Know*

Fig.6, *The World I Only Know*

Fig.7, *Lonely Paradise*

Fig.8, *Lonely Paradise*

Fig.9, *Never Gonna Give You Up*

Fig.10, *Never Gonna Give You Up*

Fig. 11, *Never Gonna Give You Up*

Fig.12, *The Two Fridas*
Frida Khalo, 1939

Fig.13, *Broken Column*
Frida Khalo, 1944

Fig. 14, *Revolving Self Portrait*
Nadar, 1865

Fig.15, *Super Mario Clouds*
Cory Archangel, 2002
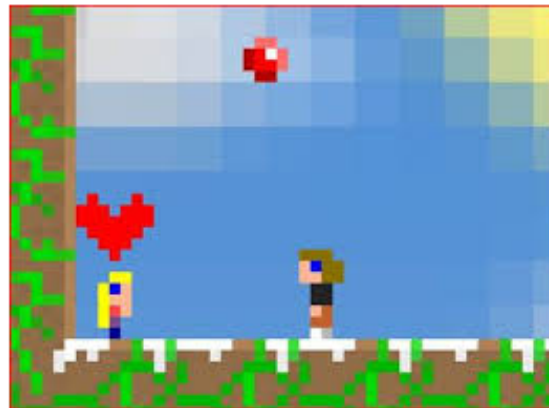

Fig.16, *Super Mario Movie*
Cory Archangel, 2005

Fig.17, *Passage*
Jason Rohrer, 2011
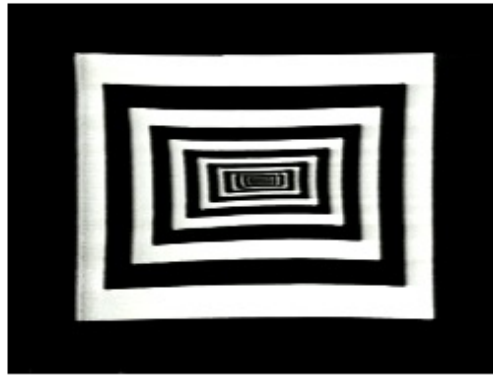

Fig.18, *Gravitation*
Jason Rohrer, 2011
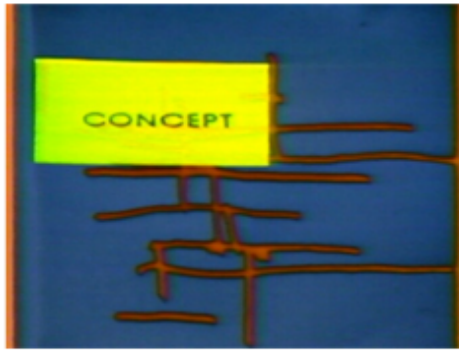
Fig.19, *Black/White/Text*
Gary Hill, 1980

Fig.20, *Picture Story*
Gary Hill, 1979
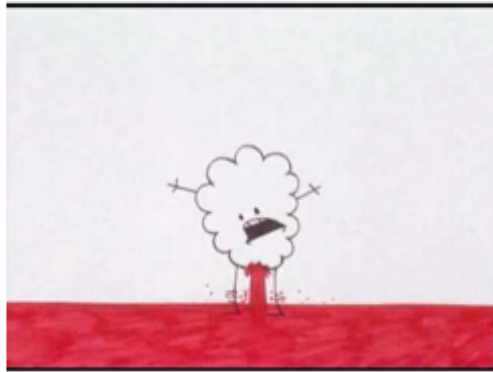

Fig.21, *Primarily Speaking*
Gary Hill, 1983

Fig.22, *Rejected*
Don Hertzfelt, 2000

Fig.23, *The Meaning of Life*
Don Hertzfeldt, 2005

Fig.24, *World of Tomorrow*
Don Hertzfeldt, 2015

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