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Look Where Your Darts Have Landed Then Determine The Target: Stop Motion Animation as Illumination of Process

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Look Where the Darts Have Landed Then Determine the Target:
Stop Motion Animation as Illumination of Process

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

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June 2013

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 1
A Description of Work in the Thesis Exhibition.....	Page 4
Making Movies By Yourself (Process).....	Page 8
Timeline.....	Page 13
Outside Philosophies.....	Page 18
Influence(s).....	Page 22
Monitors Vs. Projectors: Methods of Display.....	Page 26
Conclusion.....	Page 28

Introduction:

I made two videos for my thesis and they are my first expeditions into the realm of animation. Prior to that, I fancied myself a painter but usually made drawings. I always found my approach to drawing to build up the surface with tiny little marks. In animation, you have to work frame by frame; the process of creation has to be linear but the editing process is fairly nonlinear. I saw a direct correlation between the way I would approach a drawing, painting or collage and the way I approached animation. I would build an animation up out of tiny little units, just as I would a drawing. Both processes of working felt quite comfortable to me

Before this, I had no experience with working with or manipulating moving images aside from a video class taught by Allen Ruppensburg in college. I like watching movies- renting a video from Blockbuster or sitting in the dark with one thousand strangers. Sometimes I would watch a movie and go on a walk afterward and while walking, I'd daydream about making my own movies. I do the same thing after hearing a song that resonates with me. I always wanted to make movies, but I always had the impression that making a film requires collaboration; I have anxiety about being around others while in the fragile state of the creative process. That's why I gravitated towards animation; it could be done completely alone, in the studio, during the day or at night.

My initial impressions about the craft of animation is that it required one to be patient and masterful. I consider myself neither; one of the things that appealed to me about animation was you do some work, and you can instantly see the results of what you did through the magic of motion. I don't believe in doing a bunch of research before starting a project; I believe that research should be done during production and after production when you're planning your next move. I'm researching every day, although not in a very rigorous

manner, but it is every day, so things balance out. Embarking on an animation was so exciting to me, I figured that the momentum would carry me forward and I would learn on the job.

Sometimes, after completing a project, I feel that I've made a mistake and my time would have been better doing something else. If I was working with abstraction, I think that maybe my efforts would have been best spent towards figuration, or vice versa. If I was drawing, I sometimes think that I would have rather been painting. I feel that making these two animations was time wisely spent. While I have problems with them, I feel that I took the right path; I enjoyed the process. I once heard Donald Judd talk about his trouble with painting and what interested, the fruit of his pursuit, him was actually in sculpture. I think a lot of what I was looking for was present in animation, both in the process and the finished product. A lot of my own interests can live and breathe within the realms of a short animated film.

When I got to graduate school, I started out by making faux-naïve expressionistic figurative drawings. I did not think they were faux-naïve at the time; I had quite a knowledge of naïve drawing and painting practices, from DuBuffet's collection of art brut to some of the work being made today. It was exciting for me to play with these tropes. I think people on the fringes of society can make a picture that is loaded with charged marks, interesting compositions, and an overall fascinating way of looking at the world. It is said that the wise man and the mad man swim in the same waters, but the wise man has scuba gear. From making text drawings in ink, and ultimately ended up making stop motion animation. While on the surface the subject matter may have changed from project to project, I believe my underlying approach to the creative process and my state of mind was consistent. All the complications of the moving image allowed for a variety of different artistic choices and led to different tangents and paths. Everything could be broken down frame by frame. My stop motion animations involve me performing various actions in parts of the studio and on a table

top covered in green felt in the studio. The approach to animation that I took was experimental, improvisational, and meandering. How do I approach the issue of an object in motion? Could I have primarily worked in video and moved things around with sticks and string, the way that the puppeteers work? How is a structure for a piece achieved without narrative?

I wanted to engage in the process of making moving images as a way to meander and improvise amongst line, subject, and color. When I was drawing, I would always start by making haphazard marks on the surface and then try to piece those haphazard marks together into a coherent composition from the random marks. I liked the idea of making two animated shorts. Even though there are no drawings in my thesis exhibition, I feel that all the issues that I was exploring with drawing, building something up over time, acting intuitively, and making a piece of art that references its own making.

A Description of Work in the Thesis Exhibition

After showing an animation to one visitor in the studio, I was asked “allright, what am I looking at?” I wasn’t sure how to answer this question. Should I give the visitor a literal description of what he just saw, or should I be deciphering between the lines and delivering the transcription. In the spirit of the former, I'm going to start by breaking down what is actually in the animations. The videos are exploratory. What would it look like if I made an animation?

For my thesis, I am showing two short films; *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper* and *Stack Variations/Void Expansion*. Both are made in the manner of traditional stop motion animation: I arrange some objects, take a picture, move the objects ever so slightly, take another picture, then move the objects again. This process is repeated ad infinitum. One film is on the table top and one is on the floor. One animation engages the hands (smaller than a breadbox, tabletop scale) while the other animation engages the entire body. (bigger than a breadbox, life-size)

Animation is a process that unfolds slowly no matter how fast you move and shoot. The shot has to be composed and the aperture of the camera has to open and close and the information has to be recorded as film or digital animation. It is a process that cannot be done live; if animation goes too fast, it enters the realm of puppetry. I am interested in the visual quality that comes from watching something frame by frame. I think of myself as a painter who is pretending to be a filmmaker; or perhaps maybe I was always a filmmaker but I was trapped in the body of a painter, or rather, maybe with a painter’s psyche, unable to escape until my last year of graduate school. There is a tactile, physical presence both with

the objects I am working with and the way that said information is recorded by the camera. It wouldn't be possible to achieve a similar physicality if I was working with the moving image in a computer.

What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper is a seven-minute long animation where objects move around on a green felt backdrop. The objects, like the green felt backdrop, are loosely related to the realm of theatrical magic: cards, candles, and human hands. Objects disappear, reappear, and multiply, just as in a magic show. Other items in the shoot are common everyday items but frequently used in art; bricks, bar clamps, and masking tape. I shot more footage than I needed, and a lot of the footage got edited out; everything was shot out of sequence and put together at the end. The animation starts out introducing the elements of the production, ideas that will occur again and again, using one long shot to establish these elements. A candle burns down, my hand moves and multiplies pieces of string, stacks of cards build and diminish. A little bit of the backdrop gets slowly cut away with a scissors. The camera opens and closes it's aperture. It lets in pure white light and canceling everything out to complete darkness. The light of 64 tea candles resting on CD-roms creates a prismatic effect of light. Pipe cleaners get spit out of the holes of a bull nose bricks. Pipe cleaners tie themselves into knots and rearrange themselves as strange letters.

Since *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper* exists in a world of moving objects, I've listed all the objects below.

- Playing Cards (52 cards in a deck, jokers included, the classic red bicycle design on the back of the card; at times, more than one deck is at play)
- String (white, black; also, pipe cleaners disguised as string)
- A candle (as well as a candle stick holder, although I don't know if I'm as much a fan of the candle stick as I am of the candlestick holder)
- A felt green backdrop (gaming table green)

- Bricks
- Digital Clock (numbers obscured by black masking tape)
- A yogurt container which acts as an analog clock
- A piece of glass that was once on my painting table, where the backside was painted white
- My hands, which enter into the piece as I move objects around

All of the aforementioned objects are smaller than a breadbox. *Stack Variations/Void Expansion* started out as me wanting to get away from the scale of the tabletop. I thought that by making something that was human scale, if I could put my entire body in the animation, I would be getting away from the world of miniature. I had also been purposely putting my hand into Clockmaker for long periods of time, photographing it frame by frame. Pieces of live action get stuck inside the stop motion. I took this to another level and put my entire body into Stack Variations.

Stack Variations/Void Expansion takes its title from the fact that this animation involves stacking a lot of bricks. That's the stack part- the void part comes from when I outlined the peephole in my studio door with a black circle, and just kept adding to the black circle until it blacked out the entire door and leaked onto the surrounding architecture walls and surrounded the doorknobs and the light switch.

-Opens with a light moving across the studio floor, slowly raising on a stack of bricks to illuminate its surroundings:

-Lite effects/lens flare/phenomenological effects of light as picked up by the camera

-Aperture opens and f-stop increases to let Doorlight illuminates the room:

Lens flare and the phenomenological experiment of how light is received by the apparatus of the camera

-Dog shows and takes a short nap:

Exploration of natural factor of the environment

-Transparent body does pushup:

Showing the structure of the animation

-Brick stack and unstack:

A human doing magic mixed with some small sculpture-making actions

-A black circle growing slowly around the peephole:

An exploration of painting and drawing through the moving image.

-Door opens:

An exploration of environment

-Building a tower of bricks as I hide myself behind the tower that I made:

A human doing magic mixed with some small sculpture making action

-Door opens:

An exploration of environment through stop motion

-A plastic water bottle moves around a bare bulb on the floor:

Lens flare and a phenomenological observation of how light is received by the apparatus of the camera.

Making Movies by Yourself (Process)

I appear in the animations I make, at first by accident, when I was caught on films trying to move things around. I recognized this moment where the hand comes in; it's often the thing in stop motion tutorials on youtube that people try to erase. It is something that shows the making of the movie. I don't think of myself as a performer; I think of myself as the maker accidentally caught on camera, but then I end up using this accidentally selfie as part of the structure of the animation..

There are two moments when the animation became activated for me; one was where my hand showed up, another was when I cut away the backdrop in *What The Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*. The hand; the cutting, and the drawing. I thought of my drawing as obscuring and decorating the cards, transforming the cards their design and hopefully making them appear more than cards. Both are instances of mark making, showing the hand within the production. When Matisse was making his cutouts, he would refer to it as “drawing with scissors.”

As I have mentioned, all the animation is done in the real world; none of the animation has been done "in-computer." I shot it all on a digital camera, then downloaded the shots into final cut pro. While the apparatuses were digital, I consider it to be an analog process. I don't think I would have been able to make this animation if I had shot it on film. I could see the snaps instantly and do kind of a clunky animation with the scroll wheel that would be displayed on the camera's lcd screen. A lot of the decisions I made with the animation were able to happen on the fly thanks to the lcd screen/scroll wheel. I was able to see the results in the digital camera- see the lighting, see how the colors showed up on the screen, and to see how objects moved. It would have been very different if I was shooting on film and had to send the results to a lab, wait two weeks to be able to watch and assess what I

had done. I believe all my ideas, both conceptual and formal, can be put into animation. I am exploring scale and quantity through time rather than scale and quantity through space. I think my approach to animation benefitted greatly from the access to digital technology.

While working on these animations, I allowed myself to be open to my own ignorance to the medium. I think my ignorance of the medium contributed to my success with using animation. It doesn't quite fit into the realm of traditional animation or even experimental animation; maybe more in line with experimental film, something like Stan Brakhage, but even that's not quite right. This area of study is something that I want to delve deeper into. Knowing that my animations would be a little catawampus freed me up in terms of certain decisions that I could make. I didn't need to tell a story- I was more interested in the technology of the animation, how it could or couldn't perform. What is more interesting to watch: sports, or sports bloopers? Why is the blooper reel part of the DVD extras and not part of the actual movie? I hate the term "happy accidents", accidents and mistakes are neither happy or sad, it's just that something didn't go as intended. Plans got thrown off course, either gradually or instantaneously. I don't believe it's possible to make mistakes when making art; only decisions can be made when presenting the final product. So much of art and science is based on happy accidents, the vestige of the virgin Mary gets burned into a piece of toast or an apple falls on the Sir Issac Newton's melon. There is no happy accidents, there is just certain decisions made during the production of artworks about how you want to engage in your studio practice. Nothing ever goes as planned while I work; the shape of what I am doing always reveals itself while I'm working. I sometimes wish this wasn't the case; I think there would be a great amount of reward in the focus of carrying out a well-laid plan. While I would like to get better at planning and executing, I also want to keep an arena where my own tendencies and idiosyncrasies to exist in the work.

I don't have a lot of ideas upon initially starting on a project. I like the content of

my work to come from whatever process I'm engaged in. I enjoy the process of art, and it is only recently when that I realized that perhaps a rigorous train of thought about a project can be separate from the process; I always thought that drawing was a form of thinking and that I worked through making the artwork, and a lot of the work I did would end up in the garbage. I like being engaged in the physical act of moving things around; moving a stack from this corner over to that corner, fussing with the order of things.

I've always mythologized the artist alone in his bedroom or garage. I like the idea of something large being created in a small space that is not exclusively used for work. The studio where I made my animation was bigger than most graduate school studios, but it still had some of the characteristics of a motel room. Making art in the bedroom, living room, shed is an embarrassingly romantic concept, but I think one can engage in that type of work on that scale and still maintain a certain amount control and highlight the idiosyncratic tendencies during production.

I'm a process oriented. I think these animations reflect that there is a process involved with making the pieces. I just kind of have to sit down and get to work. I've been making art long enough and with enough consistency, that I think I've given up on the fact of having an idea, that ideas never come out the way you want, that just working every day is the most important thing one can do if they have artistic inclinations. I'm making animation with the intention of getting into the studio every day and changing the piece around ever so slightly, just like water dripping in a cave can create a stalactite over time. I always think of the hole in the penitentiary wall in the *Shawshank Redemption*, where Tim Robbins chips away at tunnels away at a hole in the wall day by day. I would love to have that amount of persistence on one project, only completing a small micron of it at a time, and when all the pieces add up to hole one could only fathom through the labor of creation.

I want to make ambitious works of art, but I find scale often times is a stand in for ambition. I hesitate to say that I'm attracted to labor intensive works of art; I do believe that art needs to be carefully considered and awareness of what is happening in a work of art will grow over time.

I believe each art piece is like a plant that should be given an individual pot and watered and cared for and moved around the house once or twice so it receives the proper sunlight. I am not growing crops I am growing individual plants. I think there is a difference between the food being produced on a large plantation and harvested by machines, and locally grown organic produce. One model is more cost effective but the flavor flattens out. I think that by spending more time on individual works of art, you can get to a place and see things that are more particular to your own time and space. Usually, the first thing out of my mouth is a cliché; the first thing drawn from a pen is a cliché; I draw the same portrait faces that the caricaturist on Venice beach might draw. I like the idea of growing a vegetable in the backyard; the quality may be only slightly better than a tomato bought at Ralphs, but I believe that the slight increase of quality is what makes a work of art resonate. Duchamp said, "I could have made a hundred thousand readymades in ten years easily. They would all have been fake... abundant production can only result in mediocrity." My natural inclination is to make only a few things very slowly. Working with animation, I feel I can do this without apology by working with animation. It limits my production in a very natural way. While I claim this as an asset, I have suspicions towards this attitude. That I may be a perfectionist and this is my way to justify it. I sometimes think that it would be better to make a lot of stuff and most of it is crap and I throw out the crap and keep the gems. Keep the fruits of your labor and throw the rest in the trash. This process gets played out for me over the course of the production of one work of art rather than multiple pieces.

I like to think that I work intuitively. It has only been recently I have begun to ask

myself “what is my intuition made of?” How much do aesthetic undertakings have to be planned out in advance? Do you really get something more expected if you just go out in the dark with only a flashlight, vs. if you draw up plans and fulfill them., but I have started to have a desire to pick apart what intuition is and to figure out what shapes my intuition and how I can shape it in the future. I think that even though I try to adopt a style of working that is free flowing, and stream of consciousness, recognizing problems and limitations and adapting to the on the fly, I ultimately that is not the most “freeing” way to work. My definition of a free way to work would be one in which the work you were doing is enjoyable and also the work you do would allow you do come up with a radically different solution than to something that you started with. I do not know about the so called stream of conscious, improvisational way of working. The stream of consciousness may actually be a moat that surrounds the prison built by bricks of your unchecked tendencies, impulses and desires. With *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*, I literally just grabbed objects that I had on hand; a candlestick. I had a vague notion that I was going to be dealing with the visual language of theatrical magic and repeated rituals. When I was drawing the loop with the candle, it felt like a ritual.

The artistic process becomes interesting to me when it allows me to learn new things. Can process be content, or is process as content an easy way of avoiding having to deal with content? How does a work of art reference something outside of itself? Sometimes I feel like there is no way I can approach any kind of content other than the work of art itself. I would like to take content more into consideration, but actually thinking about what I was making without any physical object present was a completely foreign process to me.

Timeline

I started graduate school with the desire to be a painter, but as with most people who want to be painters, it never works out. I have this idea in my head that real painters don't think about whether or not they're painters; they just paint. They don't have any choice, at least that's the romantic notion that I hold in my head and heart. I wanted to come in make paintings, and get really good at paintings. I was hardly ever able to make a painting I was proud of; things either became quickly overworked or didn't look finished. I couldn't quite get the hold of mixing colors. Mixing paint wasn't part of my natural state; I mostly just draw or make lists. Ideas about color didn't make themselves apparent to me until very recently.

I had been stuck on the text based drawings. I started out with a hand drawn animation. There was a piece of scratch paper that I grabbed out of the recycling bin in the art office. It was a map of the American Southwest. I taped it to my window and then taped another piece of paper on top of that. I grabbed an orange marker and filled in some of the letters that shown through the first piece of paper. I kept putting fresh pieces of scratch paper on top of that, and eventually, out of a network of orange dots a figure appeared.

Whenever I put pen to paper, a figure eventually appeared, at least that's what happened what would happen when I used to draw. I thought it was intuition that I was relying on, but the figure always appeared in the drawing because of habit. Eventually, things emerged in my first animation. It relied primarily on drawing. A figure and he opened and closed his mouth and his insides morphed and there was a horse near him and some kind of ostrich head and these Bart Simpson heads popped up, and then I tried to introduce this blinking alien head and go back to the map of the southwest and have the map of the southwest move as the alien head blinked, and there was a duck that moved along on the bottom of the page. Most of it was pretty basic, nothing to exciting, but the tape that I used to tape down the animation, I

would stick it on each drawing as I finished it, and that became a part of what was going on.

The tape, being a part of the real world in turn became the most interesting part of what was happening. The slowness of drawing every frame by hand (I don't mind drawing frame by frame, it is the slow unfolding of animation that appeals to me.) It was taking a long time, and it wasn't the drawing that was interesting me so much but the camera, how the drawing would take on a bluish tone at night, a yellowish tone under the the halogen lightbulbs, whatever those are called, and a greenish tone under the fluorescent lights. It was the tactility of the tape, casually stuck on each time as it moved across the paper. I was overwhelmed at the thought of moving into stop-motion animation. There was always something about stop-motion animation that appealed to me- I loved Gumby (insert image of Gumby) as a kid, as well as Pee-Wee's playhouse, the intro to which I remembered in my mind as stop motion. Stop motion with Three Dimensional objects as opposed to two dimensional drawings would go a lot faster, and it would give me more freedom to work with the camera (which I feel I have yet to do, really play with the camera) and also to play with editing techniques, and really play with how objects move, and the most important thing, which was probably at the heart of my desire to go into animation Time.

I started out making a hand drawn animation; this came out of the repetitive text pieces that I was making. I didn't want to make a large scale repetitive drawing; what I wanted to do was figure out how to make something with ambition utilizing repetition that didn't necessarily have to do with size. I made the hand drawn two dimensional animation then photographed the individual drawings. Through this process, I realized that I enjoyed using the camera. The move from 2-D animation into 3-D animation was so that I had more room to play with editing and the camera. Building up an animation and drawing every frame out took far too long, and I wanted to get deep into the editing process and also the process of shooting. While I was taking pictures of drawings, I eventually became interested in the

way natural vs. artificial light would act on the drawing, as well as what would happen when I fed the sequence of drawings into the computer and edited them/ chopped them up. I wanted more of that; putting sequences of images together where I set up an arrangement of objects, light it, take a picture, then move the elements ever so slightly.

I came into UCR making drawings and paintings. I always had more success with drawing; I was able to escape the tyranny of the canvas. There is something about the democratic, everyday nature of drawing that makes it a more approachable medium. I've always had more success working with a smaller scale rather than a larger scale. Animation was a way for me to achieve a certain amount of ambition. While I agree that large works of art have to be dealt with in a way that smaller works don't demand, I feel that not everything warrants a large scale. I want to make art that contains all the information (whether it's marks or frame after frame) on a single surface that can be easily moved and stored.

I was searching for something that I could build slowly, piece by piece. I think that some of my more successful drawings have been a succession of marks, layered over many sittings. Often, the first thing put down is an uninteresting cliché.

I had this saying in my head for a long time, and I don't quite know how to put it more eloquently: art is a game of millimeters. More specificity creates a more unique experience. A little to the left or a little to the right and the piece can fall apart; shifting intentions can ruin something completely. How are conceptual artists like mystics? It is like throwing a dart into the Grand Canyon and not quite knowing what the target is; you look at where your darts have landed.

The smallest unit of the animation is the frame. I take the animation one frame at a time, which then gets fed into final cut pro. I then group the frame together and transfer the series of frames into movies. I try rearranging the clips, slowing them down, speeding them

up, changing the size, and changing the color. For *What The Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*, I did a lot of speed manipulation of the film clips and changed the colors quite drastically.

The process I have when I am making an animation is meandering and exploratory. The fantasy would be just to completely give myself over to taking pictures and feeding it into the computer. Animation doesn't always let you do that. I love the films of Pixar and Disney. It's something I never thought of doing because I felt it was so far out of my technical range, but it was an idea that I would come back to in my head again and again whilst lost in a daydream. I like making art where I get to learn something. Learning on the job then becomes part of the work, showing process and making art where the artists hands, elegance, where slick moves and mishaps swim in the same pool, are laid bare for the viewer to see.

For both *Stack Variations/Void Expansion* and *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*, I kind of made it up as I went along. I often work without a plan. Even though I don't have much of a plan when I work, I have a general idea. Of course, whenever working without a plan and relying upon intuition, I think it is important to distinguish the difference between intuition and falling back habit. I have some good habits and I have some bad habits. What is real and original coming from your mind as it relates to your hand, and what is just a watered down version of particles trapped in a mental net from the cultural ether? Is it possible for one to enter the production of a work of art without any preconceived notions about the finished products? I guess that I start a work of art by staring into the void rather than deciphering blueprints. Are the blueprints laid out over your retina, encoded in your DNA, so no matter where you stare you are looking at blueprints whether you want to or not? This is probably the case. If I were to eat my own cake and have it, I would say that the artwork draws it's own blueprint as it wills itself into existence. I like to think of an

artwork comes out completely different from where it started to where it eventually ends up.

Robert Bresson had a great quote “Ideas are born on my head, and I kill them when I write them out. The actors bring them back to life, and I kill it again with my camera. It comes back to life on the editing table.” [citation needed]

As I work, I try to be conscious of the formal moves that I’m making. Animations are a series of incremental decisions. I actually don’t pay much attention to my habits as I work, although as I write this, I am thinking that I should be doing so. As I write down these thoughts for my thesis, I am realizing that I should be paying more attention to my habits, especially if I want to work in an intuitive manner, exploratory, and experimental manner. Learning something new as well as making a work of art to change your viewpoints on culture and the world at large. To go into something blindfolded; there is a scene in the animation where the hand fumbles around blindly on a brick. I want to be a man blindfolded, having never seen an elephant; feeling around and describing a completely new creature; I am not so concerned with whether or not if it is an elephant I am touching; I am concerned with my own perception of the creature as I blindly feel around and how I relate that to an audience. To be completely unaware and uncertain about the outcome was one of my initial intentions when going into the work.

Outside Philosophies:

What Informs *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper* and *Stack Variations/Void Expansion*

Here is the main reason I wanted to do animation; because I probably spend more time on youtube than I do watching/reading about/absorbing art, and arguably, even some of the art that I absorb exists on youtube, vimeo, or ubuweb. On my phone or on the computer; I rely on youtube to stimulate me and get information.

Make something you're stoked on. I was trying to make something I was "stoked on." Julian Hoeber you should make work that makes you want to pop your head out the door and say "over here guys! Look at this!" I've never been quite comfortable with showing my work to others, but I am realizing more and more that it's necessary, that it creates a feedback that's essential to progress as well as complicating the process of artmaking.

Ultimately, I want to make something I'm interested in. I hold my own engagement with a work of art above all else. If it makes sense and resonates with me, hopefully I can have it make it sensible and resonate with others.

I was watching an lecture online by Douglas Trumbull. Douglas Trumbull was responsible for the special effects for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Space Odyssey 2001* and also directed the films *Silent Running* and *Brainstorm*. Some of the special effects for that movie were an oddly perfect mixture of painting, sculpture and photography. I am thinking specifically about the model that Trumbull made of Jupiter for 2001. While I was making these films, I had the romantic notion of myself as a lone tinkerer making his own special effects in his garage, at least that was the narrative that I used to keep myself going. I

liked the slow pace.

Reduced music. I like music that's only a piano and voice, or only a guitar and a voice, or better yet, only a piano or only a voice. I believe MTV refers to this as "unplugged", although even when I listen to MTV unplugged I still think there is too much going on. They have to give all the members of the band something to do, when they should just get rid of band members. I have recently recognized this tendency in my own tastes, and I have been striving towards this tendency in my own work. Sometimes, you go to eat at a crappy restaurant and they put sauce all over everything. I don't like a lot of sauce on my food. I want to make art that doesn't have a lot of sauce on it. I think there is a tendency to put a lot of sauce on things if I get nervous that there isn't enough going on in an artwork.

My own relationship to humor is that I actively court it, but I do not claim it. I think that actively asserting a work of art as humorous is to I think of something that I want to do. I tend to focus on process; I believe that making work is all about rolling up your sleeves and getting down to business. I would never actively lay claim to courting humor in a work of art.

Time has always been something that I thought about, in particular, human perception of time. I don't think I've gotten to the core with my interest in time regarding these animations, but I think I am getting closer. I have always been interested in Time Travel- watching Back To the Future, I remember having some very mind bending daydreams at my desk at school the next day. Our fourth grade teacher read us the Ray Bradbury short story about the dangers of time travel and messing with the timeline. I thought of my pseudo-neo classical/still life paintings that I made my first year here, heavily influenced by De Chirico, late Picabia, and various tendencies towards neo-classicism in contemporary art. I was wearing a watch with a digital face when I had my first and only chemically induced

psychedelic experience. I thought I had felt two hours go by, and when I looked down, it had only been eight minutes. Why does school and work go so slow but evenings, weekends, and mornings fly by. There are the clichés about time and how we experience- time flies when you're having fun, or time stands still. Cliches about hearing the clock tick. I wrote about the nature of mixed up time periods, but it was more *Bill and Ted Excellent Adventure* style of time period pastiche than any actual real reference to time.

I could go on about the nature of time, but I would have to question how much of it would be pertinent to the work in *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Time Keeper*. I do not think of the film as a meditation on time or even something that plays with the viewers perception of time, but rather, as a song or a tone poem that has certain things that index time; the candle; the clock (although is a clock an index of time? Digital numbers and analog hands can be easily manipulated.) The medium of time is inherent to animation- there are about twelve frames a second that go by in your typical run of the mill animated moving picture. When I was drawing animation by hand, on a good day, I could knock out one second every six hours. With the stop motion and having the objects move, I can shoot about 100 frames in one night- on a good night, I can get about ten seconds of movie done.

The medium of animation has the element of time into it; a big selling point for the film *ParaNorman* is that it took the equivalent of 120 years of human life to produce, if you combined the people-hours of everyone who worked on the film. When I was heavily involved in making paintings and drawings (mostly the paintings and drawings that I made before going to school, I would pride myself in spending a long time on things- covering the entire surface with tiny details, erasing and redrawing, painting things out, over and over again then adding them back into the picture.) I often felt the most at ease when a painting or drawing took a long amount of time, but I always felt it was uninteresting when the only thing that a painting or a drawing had going for it was that it took a long time, when it

seemed that the success of a drawing was hinged on time spent, which looking back on it, is a criteria of judging drawing that is wholeheartedly uninteresting. (insert image of favorite paintings or drawings below.) Sometimes, I would fill up a drawing with so many individual pencil marks, it would just read as fields of grey noise. I abandoned this approach of all-over, repetitive, time-consuming drawing when I got to grad school to accommodate the freedom of constant deadlines, where we were all in the same boat, to construct rather than to judge, where the stakes were low in the fact that I imagine one is expected to fail and get out of their comfort zone, at least that's how I wanted to use my grad school experience. I liked the endless re-working and re-thinking that comes with a time consuming process. I didn't want to just spread out a multitude of marks over a large field (I used to cite one of my earlier influences as where's Waldo.) I wonder if it's even that interesting.

In order to use point to the elements of time at play, in *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*, I use objects that are inherent to marking time; a burning candle, a digital alarm clock (whose face I obstruct in some parts of the film and in other parts, I digitally manipulate the clock face frame by frame.) Ultimately, I do not think that this is a film that is solely a meditation on time; a lot of other factors are entering into the mix. If I am pinned down and have to use an analogy, I would say that it's more like a song, where rhythms and texture change ever so slightly. I use the lid from a 32 oz. plastic non-fat greek yogurt container from Trader Joe's. I pinned it to the green backdrop; the tab that makes the yogurt easy to open kind of makes the hands of a timer. The candle burning down is it's own source of time; the candles I got from the Indian market gave me about an hour and twenty minutes. All of these elements keep time, in however an off-kilter way, as cards, bricks, and string gets moved around on the table- even the cards, bricks and string could be considered tools of measurement and counting- there are even 52 cards in a deck for the 52 weeks in a year.

Influences

Is there a relation to experimental film, art in the traditional gallery sense, narrative cinema, classic animation?

This may be familiar to fans of video art who notice a similarity between say this video and a Bruce Naumann or Early Wegman video where dudes are kicking it in the studio, walking around and such. This was not an intentional reference; I was just photographing what I was working with, without a backdrop, although the fact that I stuck with the motif of just a studio in the background probably has a lot to do with the fact that artists have done it in the past and there was a visual recognition.

The subject matter of both animations can be experiments that were taking place in stack variations- things with the camera, light, and the light refracted off the physicality of objects. These were “small phenomenologies”, nothing earth shattering, but I was experimenting with them. Since a big part of my influence was Children’s Television Shows, I’m specifically speaking about Lavar Burton stirring a glass of water with glitter in it, I try really hard to listen, retain, and process information during studio visits, but I’m not sure if I retain information of if I’m interpreting what is being said, or I can say it back in a relatable manner. Cinder blocks stack up on limes, a smaller brick gets moved from the side of the cinderblock to the next. Objects cast strange shadows on the wall. Light is put in strange places. My whole body is visible, a lot of the elements within the animation take two hands to move. The primary move for this animation is the stack- and sometimes, I insert myself over the objects as they move. Using stop motion as live action creates an effect of jerkiness which I like, but only when it occurs naturally- not when it’s forced.

A lot of the criticism surrounding *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper* was that it was like watching toy soldiers moving in a world of minature; a world of miniature/toys come to life. I felt that maybe the objects and the nature of the objects called for something more concrete and existing in the real world. Michael Shroads, a colleague of mine here in graduate school, brought up Joseph Cornell in relation to some of my videos. Cornell had a miniature nature to it. I wanted to have objects on a larger scale; objects that were a little heavy. When I think of heavy objects, bricks are usually the first things that I think about. I wanted to manipulate an object that had a stronger gravitational pull than a playing card or the burned down nub of a candle.

Alex Hubbards films had an impact on me when I saw them, in particular *Cineapolis* and *Collapse of the Expanded Field*. I saw him dealing with issues of paintings in the films, although that wasn't the only thing that was going on in his movies. I remember sitting down and watching his video at the Whitney all the way through. Before that, I never gave video art the time of day. I was very inspired after watching the video, but it took me years to process that reaction.

I felt that approaching film in any performative way was too intimidating. I would be terrified to take on such giants as Bruce Naumann or William Wegman. I felt that approaching film through the medium of animation was my way of entering into the recording of acts in the studio. So often, stop motion is employed to deliver a clear narrative, like with Children's television, either *Gumby* or a Christmas special. There are also European stop motion animators (think Jan Svankmajer) who traffic heavily in surrealism. I'm a bit of a surrealist myself, but I don't like it when things are too surreal. I want to get as close to the mundane drone of everyday life as I possibly can.

I think I had an interest in what might be defined as artwork that explicitly depicts some of the activities in the studio. I don't have much of a relationship with Bruce Naumann, although in undergrad I checked out a book of his from the library and poured over it, looking at each image over and over again. I liked the text pieces a lot, as well as the drawings he made. The videos didn't speak to me at the time. There was a lot of stomping around. I didn't quite understand. Studio activity; I never absorbed that information consciously.

Wegman I was always familiar with the children's books. I became aware of his short films, and he had these visual gags that would play out, really quick visual gags, but it wouldn't be an easy punchline. He would lift some weights with oranges being held in the crook of his armpits, so when he lifted the weights the oranges dropped to the floor. They were short sketches. They are videos of the artist in the studio, doing studio activities, or fooling around with the physical properties of objects around the house as they relate to the artist's body. I have the objects moving around. I take a picture, change slightly what I am taking a picture of, then take another picture. I repeat this over and over again.

One idea that I was clued into by Brandon Lattu was that these are videos as kind of a physics experiment; experimenting with what the camera can do, harsh light and softer light, experimenting of bricks can stack up on a lime. My interest in camerawork probably came from existing in conversations that were photo dominant (some of the stronger personalities at this school tend to be photographers).

The bricks are units of movement. As I was making these videos, I became aware that when a brick, or an inanimate object moves across the screen, it takes on an anthropomorphic quality. It sounds like that should have been a given, but it took me a while of watching to figure that out. I slowly became less and less interested in the anthropomorphic quality of an object, or an anthropomorphic quality of an object

highlighting itself. It seems like the easiest thing to do with animation- think of the walking tripod in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*. A candle burning down to a nub is a unit of movement.

I've often moved from piece to piece, with seemingly no connection or common thread between bodies of work. I always thought that the common thread would become evident as I worked on a body of work. I thought that just the nature of my own existence, that would create a common thread, that it was impossible to be all over the place because it was all going through one filter. I guess I always thought that by making things with my hands, the way I approached something would be dictated by my hands. I always thought of an artists hand kind of like the voice of the singer; the stronger that a singers voice became; the more they could take any song and make it their own; I always think of Daniel Johnson singing covers by the Beatles, how it takes something universal and pop and turns it into a dark, manic expression of longing. Put it against Tom Jones singing a Beatles cover. Or even Elliott Smith covers of the Beatles. So I thought the hand was going to be the thing that linked works together; I always wanted an awkward hand and a forced line.

Monitors vs. Projectors: Methods of Display

For the presentation of both videos, I went with a monitor. Partially this may have been a wrong choice; a projection on a wall is elegant and neutral where a monitor asserts itself as a consumer object. Nothing says "luxury goods" like a flatscreen tv. Although there is an elegance and straightforwardness to a projection, the monitor allows for deeper blacks. When working with a monitor, charcoal gray is the darkest tone you can get. Since my video was low contrast, I thought that the monitor was the best solution. Going with a monitor gives me a greater amount of saturation. I do think the projector is a classier solution, however. I like the reference to a film projector, since since the animation exists of individual frames. I feel that has more of the quality of a film than of video. I'm not quite sure how the video camera works, but I see the video camera as taking in information in real time rather than the sprockets of a film camera, taking in light as information in each individual frame.

I don't think my videos rely on the gallery space for their effectiveness. It is not a video that needs to exist in an installation; one of my initial ideas about making a video had to do with its portability; it could be given out as a DVD, put up on the internet, or screened at a film festival. I have very little experience when presenting video, but I wanted to make an animation that could exist in many different spaces. There is no explicit narrative in either of the videos. Instead, there is a series of events that happen in sequence one after another. To paint with a broad brush, it is closer to narrative film than a phenomenological experience one would have after going into a Diana Thater or Bill Viola exhibit, where the viewer's experience is inherent to the projector in the space, monitor installation by Nam Jun Paik, where the display of the apparatus that receives the video (and in some cases, audio) signal is inextricably linked to the the information that is contained in the signal.

While the method of display is not absolutely crucial to the experience of my video, I would prefer an uninterrupted, attentive viewing of both *Stack Variations/Void Expansion* and *What the Clockmaker Gave to the Timekeeper*. It is not meant to be viewed at 2:00 pm on a Wednesday afternoon in an office cubicle In between spreadsheets. I would like the viewing to exist as a destination, whether it be in the gallery space, part of a film festival, at a lecture, or in the artist's studio. I want both animations to exist on youtube, vimeo, and ubuweb, but I would want people to see the animations in a theater or a gallery whenever they got the chance. I know I'm opening up a can of worms right as I'm supposed to be finishing my paper up, but I like thinking of movie theaters and art galleries as churches. I can't quite define religion and I don't go to church. I have a great deal of reverence for museums, movie theaters and galleries. They help facilitate the experience of a work of art, which in turn helps facilitate unexplainable viewpoints and ideas about the world and tap into the cosmic frequencies of a particular time and place.

Both pieces were shown on monitors, and both pieces got their own individual space, each space roughly 10 feet x 10 feet. There was a bench and large flat screen on each wall. The monitors were in place to pick up the saturation of certain colors and the richness of the black tones. In this context, for the MFA thesis show at UC Riverside in 2013, it was the right way to view the animations. The animations ideally exist either on a monitor or projected in a movie theater or gallery space. Since I am a big user of youtube, vimeo, and ubuweb to look at examples of videos and art that people tell me about, I think that having my animations exist on the internet is suitable for informational purposes but is no the ideal viewing experience. I realize that may sound a little passive aggressive, but I see no other choice for communicating what is in each of the videos.

Conclusion

I can't quite get a handle on how successful I find either of the animations I made for thesis are. There are parts that resonate with me, and some parts where that I wish I could have reshot. Over time, the parts that resonate with me may prove to be stale, and the parts that I wished I could have reshot will have a newfound poetry that I was previously unaware of. I remember in an entrance interview for the MFA program at Yale, Peter Halley pointed to a drawing that I had on the wall and said "this is a good drawing, but do you know why it's a good drawing." I hindsight, I take this statement to be the beginning of my education. I think prior to graduate school, I was just repeating everything I had learned as an undergrad. I had a great undergraduate education, but it was a lot of making work without any intellectual rigor and reflection that I have been introduced to in graduate school. Between undergrad and grad, I feel like I made work consistently, but I was condemned, like Sisyphus, to rolling the boulder up the hill again and again. I was working for work sake and not concerned about ideas in my art. I still feel like I hold on to a little of this, but I am on the path to dissecting the work that I make and looking at it from a few different angles before presenting it to the world. Unlike Sisyphus before me, I have an ipod, which is a coping mechanism. I can be easily distracted while I roll the boulder up the hill (and distraction comes in many forms), and this distraction prevents me from cursing the gods for my predicament or questioning the futility of my actions. Graduate school has given me the tools to really look at the work I've made through a couple different lenses. I think I've gotten more in touch with some of the initial impulses that drew me towards the artistic process. It's hard to find what you're truly interested in if you're condemned and compelled to do it every day. Like Jay-Z said, it's a gift and a curse.

I spent a lot of time in Graduate School being frustrated with the work that I was making. At one point, I remember I wanted a professor to tell me to just stop being an artist.

That way, I could just finish up school and get a job, working on an organic farm, working at a zoo, or becoming a policeman. At certain points, I wanted to do something that I could put my entire being into so I would never have to think about art again. I don't think I'm fit for any other area of employment or any other place in society than the arts. I wanted to give up. I felt like I was making drawing after drawing and it meant nothing, but each "cycle" of work that I finished in school, I got closer to something I was interested in. I remember taking an after school course in animation that was taught by someone who taught at the community level. We did all types of animation; drawn, cut-out/collage animation, and claymation. The woman who ran the class shot all of our experiments on super 8 film. I have to imagine that the seeds for what I eventually did for my thesis were planted in this after school program.

I think it's hard for a person to find what their interests really are, and interests always shift with time. I feel like I'm getting really preachy with this last part of the paper, but I think that was why I went to graduate school, to find what my interests really were. There are so many stages of artistic production; research, sketching/planning, production, exhibition, and reflection that it is easy to get lost. If one element in any of the phases of artistic production is off, it can make the whole thing unpleasant and create for art that has no resonance with the artist or the viewer. I think with animation, each phase of the process is interesting. I like thinking about ideas for how different objects or shapes move through space. I like the process of shooting and playing with the camera, messing with the f-stops and the exposure times and shooting under strange lighting conditions. I think animation has changed my relationship to the way I view film, and while I don't consider myself a cinephile I do watch a number of movies. I have started watching films with a keener eye for the physical placement of objects and light, as well as the underlying structure that is holding all of the shots together. I am always overwhelmed and surprised when I dump all my clips into

final cut pro and play it back at different speeds. That is one of the moments in animation that draws me to the medium- the surprise of how something you made ends up looking. I like making those individual frames into clips then trying to string together something coherent for a presentation. I think there is not a lot of animation within the art context, and it seems like the perfect medium for artistic expression. While there is a lot of experimental animation out there, and it has been a big influence for me, rarely does it show the bare bones of it's own making, and it doesn't seem concerned with existing a specific yet nebulous realm, opening doors rather than closing them, providing an open read, and asking more questions than it answers.