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Production Thesis Reflection

*Odes* is a collection of five experimental shorts made on video and film about the everyday. The goals of *Odes* are two-fold: to explore the fundamental components of cinema that are unique to it as an art form and to use those attributes to create distinctly cinematic experiences of everyday sights and sounds. The piece is divided into five thematic chapters concerning how and where we experience time: Body, Outside, Work, Time, and Play. Each chapter focuses on a different medium, from 16mm film to code-based video art, and plays with various core components of the moving image, like shot composition, order, duration, repetition, and motion within and of the frame. Similarly, the audio is all original recordings and uses diverse strategies for each chapter, like foley, field recordings, documentary interviews, and music. By utilizing a variety of moving image mediums and experimental film and video techniques, *Odes* reimagines quotidian life experiences to encourage the viewer to meditate on how they experience their everyday.

I wanted to use the camera as an explorative tool, so *Odes* utilized an open-ended production process. To keep myself sane, I organized the project into five thematic chapters with the goal of creating distinct structures and using different production methods in every chapter. I wanted *Odes* to rely on primarily non-narrative structures, so I used a structuralist approach where every chapter creates its own cinematography, audio, and editing rules that the viewer figures out as they watch. I was inspired to try different moving image mediums because of the variety of production classes I've taken. In particular, I wanted to incorporate 16mm, stop motion, and code-altered video to explore if there is some quintessential essence of cinema throughout the evolution of different moving image technologies. The courses I took with Judy

Hoffman also deeply influenced *Odes*, and my general approach to video making, particularly

concerning documentary and form. *Odes* is fundamentally interested in different cinematic

representations of reality and uses recreation and documentary modes of production to explore

this. Judy also instilled in me the belief that cinema cannot convey "truth" or "reality" without

meta-analysis of its limits and conventions that are apparent to the viewer in the final product.

Every chapter of *Odes* practices this idea differently by drawing attention to mediums, different

production methods, and arranging images and sounds unconventionally.

Body follows a young woman's morning routine. The camera follows her through a series

of actions like waking up, getting dressed, brushing teeth, and making coffee. These actions are

edited with minimal ellipses so the routine occurs in near-real time. It is the most narrative

chapter of *Odes* in both content and methods of production- there is a simple story with a clear

protagonist and every shot was storyboarded, rehearsed, and blocked in advance. It is also shot

on 16mm, which inherently draws attention to the materiality of the moving image and

highlights the presence of the camera to the viewer. The audio consists of carefully recorded

foleys edited to sound as "natural" as possible, aiming to convince the viewer it's diegetic.

Body drew thematic and aesthetic inspiration from Maya Deren's relationships between

the body and camera movement and Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman*. The protagonist's

actions are carefully choreographed with the camera motion but depicts ordinary images because

I want the viewer to believe they are peering into an intimate routine that would happen with or

without the camera, which is aided by the "diegetic" audio. Similarly to *Jeanne Dielman*, I hope

the audience feels bored yet entranced while watching the woman's motions. This chapter, and a

lot of *Odes*, is inspired by Ackerman's idea of the hierarchy of images. She claims that cinema

considers everyday images, like women doing labor in the home, uninteresting and are therefore

not worthy of capturing on film, which reinforces how we conceptualize what's valuable in our lives. I want this chapter to depict the beauty of the lowest level of the hierarchy and implicitly argue for its value by using an expensive medium. By reproducing banal content through highly controlled and visible production methods, I also want Body to highlight the tension between reality and artifice that's inherently present in cinema. I think this chapter succeeded in these goals, but I'm not sure how evident the artificiality of the audio is so the intended tension might not be clear to the viewer.

Outside contains documentary videos of the outdoors from around Chicago throughout the year and audio from seven documentary interviews of undergraduate women at the University of Chicago. The images are of people walking, cars, trains, apartments, and trees. The shots range from five seconds to one minute long and the camera switches between static, panning, and tilting motions. The interviewer (me) asked the women about their daily routines, how they spend their time, and how that makes them feel, including questions about their work and play. The videos are edited together with match cuts and cuts on action across different time periods and subjects. The audio is edited into short interview excerpts rotating between the interviewees and is ordered from more routine, logistical responses to more abstract reflections on how they spend their time.

Outside was influenced by Dziga Vertov's idea of the kino-eye in concept and process. I went out with the camera to different locations without a specific goal in mind and captured shots that were interesting to me. While editing the chapter I searched for an internal logic and rhythm between the images to emulate Vertov's form of montage. By adding documentary interview audio to these images, I hoped to create a contemplative and serene space for the viewer similar to Joseph Cornell's *Angle*.

Outside is edited so that the images and audio are ordered independently of each other, so there is no intended relationship between what the viewer is seeing and hearing. I think this succeeded in producing an engaging, unpredictable, and subjective experience for the viewer because of the urge to form those relationships and perhaps creates an awareness of this underlying impulse to derive meaning. I like this process because there are infinite iterations that would yield completely different products with essentially the same "meaning", but it is also tiring because it requires producing a lot of unused video and audio.

Work consists of a variety of single-person tasks and the diegetic audio from those tasks. The video starts with washing dishes, then moves to working on a laptop, folding laundry, cooking, and exchanging money and coffee at a coffee shop. The images are uniformly composed from an "objective", birds-eye view perspective where only the worker's hands are visible. This removes the body from the worker and puts the viewer in the position of the worker. The shots are edited together so they rotate through each of the tasks from start to finish in no repeated order, starting with thirty-second shots and ending with half-a-second shots. The audio initially matches the image, but slowly starts overlapping with different tasks so that the location and action become unclear to the viewer. The images speed up into flickers as the audio builds into the sounds of every task simultaneously, then abruptly stops when the last dish is washed. Then, another pile of laundry is dumped onto the bed.

Work followed the paradigms of structural filmmaking and was especially influenced by Hollis Framption's *Zorns Lemma*. Like *Zorns Lemma,* it systematically rotates through a series of tasks that reach completion and uses one static camera angle. I wanted there to be a growing sense of stress for the viewer, so I increased the pacing to create moments of climax and catharsis and reach a flicker that's reminiscent of a film strip. I think the pacing and the editing

of this chapter reached these goals, but I would have preferred to use a greater variety of "work" content because it is quite domestic and student-oriented.

Time is composed of five time lapses (totaling approximately eight hours) of tree branch shadows and documentary audio from around Hyde Park. The time lapses take place at the same location and camera angle throughout the year from sunrise to sunset and are edited together so the shadows move across the screen in a continuous, sweeping motion. The audio is of leaves and wind blowing, kids playing, construction, and cars and trains moving by. The shadows move from screen left to screen right as the audio moves between the left, right, and center speakers, then the images and sounds double in speed and playback in reverse.

Initially, I wanted this chapter to be silent and capture a beautiful form of motion that is visible only to the camera, hoping to create a meditative experience for the viewer that illustrates how compelling the moving image can be by itself. I struggled with executing this and was disappointed by how discontinuous the shadows looked so I added sound and leaned into creating a conspicuously digital representation. I wanted the sound to serve the images so I gathered ambient sounds and used stereo effects to parallel the motion of the branches. I wanted the viewer to feel like they were there, watching the shadows move through time in this impossible, inhuman timescale, so I arranged the sounds to plausibly emulate a human auditory perspective. While Time wasn't what I thought it would be, I think it succeeds in producing a meditative space that can only be accessed through cinema.

Play contains video from a soccer game and drum set music. The video was run through Marc Downie's coding environment, Field, which tracked the motion of the foreground and background and produced abstracted moving bodies removed from any physical space. This process resulted in three versions of the abstractions. Similarly, the audio focuses on the bass

drum, snare, and hi-hat to produce three audio tracks. The images and audio are edited together so that each abstraction corresponds to one drum, and the content is ordered so that the speed and quantity of the bodies increase and reveal that they're playing soccer. The image and audio start with one abstraction and one drum and build into a faster and more complex visual and auditory rhythm.

I was hesitant about using these production methods because the product looks and feels so different from the rest of *Odes*. However, because highly digital and camera-less modes of moving image production are becoming more prevalent, I wanted to incorporate them in the spirit of exploring the independent essence of cinema. This pushed me out of my comfort zone because I'd never recorded music before and did not know how to code. I struggled with finding a strategy for putting the image and audio together because the possibilities felt infinite. As I'm writing this, Play is not yet complete, but in terms of the production process, it succeeded in pushing me to consider what it means to be an image maker in the current digital age and to explore the growing world of digital moving image production.

Reflecting now on my project, I am mostly surprised by the final result. While the themes of each chapter stayed mostly consistent throughout production, none of them resulted in my initial idea of what they would be. I was also surprised by the relationships that grew between the different chapters. For example, I didn't intend for the chapter content and editing to become more abstract throughout the piece but it reads that way now. The chapters also reached a satisfying level of conceptual cohesion to me, although I'm not sure if that translates to the viewer. I also realized that I primarily viewed the project through the eyes of an editor. The content of the images and sounds weren't the driving force of my production process as much as

how I wanted to put them together to evoke certain emotions in the viewer. I didn't know I worked that way until this project.

One advantage of the open production process is that it gave me a lot of time to determine what I wanted to capture and how to fit it into the piece conceptually. On the other hand, this system enables disorganized production practices. I mostly worked by myself and shot a lot outside, so I wasn't always able to keep myself accountable or plan shoot days because of the weather. I think working with other people or having a less explorative and more concrete shot list would have helped with some of these difficulties. I don't think I would endorse a similar production process without these changes unless I was operating on a long-scale timeline. At the same time, this production process was enjoyable and felt natural to me.

Now that I've (almost) finished the project, I am happy with the outcome. I navigated through a production process that's definitionally racked with uncertainty and succeeded in producing engaging, unique, and uniquely cinematic experiences of everyday sights and sounds.