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MA FINE ART
FINAL PROJECT ESSAY

I am interested in borrowing, in reworking, in alteration. I create moving image and experimental sound pieces through the process of sampling and editing found footage and recorded sound, aiming to reach notes of melancholia and disturbia. My practice establishes itself further as I explore sources of archived media and forgotten footage, whilst forming the meat of my own archive. I have been able to test the malleability of my practice through my initial interest collage, later morphing with found footage, moving image and sound. Originally, my research thesis statement, *"The Revolution Will Be Televised: How Collage Is Altering The Subconscious Through Moving Image"*, came to fruition through a point of stagnancy working with 2D traditional formats of collage. I felt limited by the linear approach I was taking in creating work, perhaps initially overwhelmed with an abundance of possible routes my practice may have taken. I recall stating in the very first crit that I had an interest in 'blue'. Momentarily dabbling in cyanotypes and sadness, I felt partly directionless and caught in a state of self expectation. It is only through observing, reading, watching and listening, that I was able to gauge a stronger sense of confidence, and ability to both experiment and communicate my ideas into actuality. That initial 'blue' inhabited many states and faces before it became something else resulting my practice at present.



Fig 1. *Dream*, Rhea Lempert (2021)

October, November and December 2021 consisted of sporadically creating disjointed pieces with little conceptual execution beneath them. Though my current work looks and feels greatly differently from my initial A5 pieces, these first few stages of experimentation were absolutely integral in encouraging my practice to unfold. Visually, I was inspired by the likes of Annegret Soltau, John Stezaker and Maurizio Anzeri. These artists share a likeness in their ability to manipulate forgotten photographs, both visually and conceptually concerned with altering observed identities through collage. I began creating abstract portraits, working with found materials, often using string, paper, card, forgotten photographs, wrappers, and scrap packaging. The above (fig .1), is a collage from my abstract portrait series. I felt that aesthetically it was successful in achieving a

depiction of disruption to an idyllic human image. I was particularly interested in how I was able to physically alter and rework an image, completely rewriting its original context. Ideas of taking moments from 'The Everyday' (from Lefebvre's theoretical writings), and intercepting moments observed from the mundane, solidified an atmosphere in my practice that is abundant in my work at present.

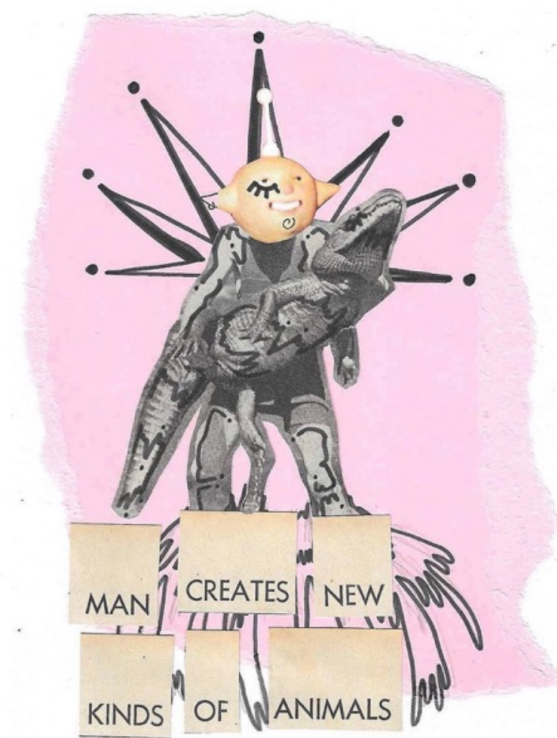


Fig 2. *Hybrid*, Rhea Lempert (2022)

Fig. 2 depicts a collage that visually presents as comedic, with fun undertones, yet, is overshadowed by a cutting jab at Western society, aiming to juxtapose human ideals concerned with proposed suggestions of success. Through capitalism, it is suggested that we should strive for financial excess, to purchase goods which to others, hint at a seeming sense of contempt. I had delved into Bill Brown's text '*Thing*

Theory', as well as Timothy Morton's text *'All Art Is Ecological'* and various Marxist theoretical essays, each identifying faults in capitalist ways of living. I had discovered that those who fail to question these societal expectations are not entirely at fault for failing to do so, but instead, it is the unavoidable mainstream media exerted for consumption. And it is there where accountable issues lie. Perhaps my work is a subconscious protest against ingrained Western ideologies. My essay, *'Existence in Excess: Displacement and Necessity Through The Material Everyday'*, establishes the ways in which my making process emulates a sense of anti-excess consumption. In only utilising found materials, such as photographs and scraps of what once was, and then reworking them to fit an alternate narrative, I have created something new. It is not new in a clinical sense, as if it has been factory packed and exists amongst its identical replicas, but new in straying from an original state, holding an almost familiar sensibility.

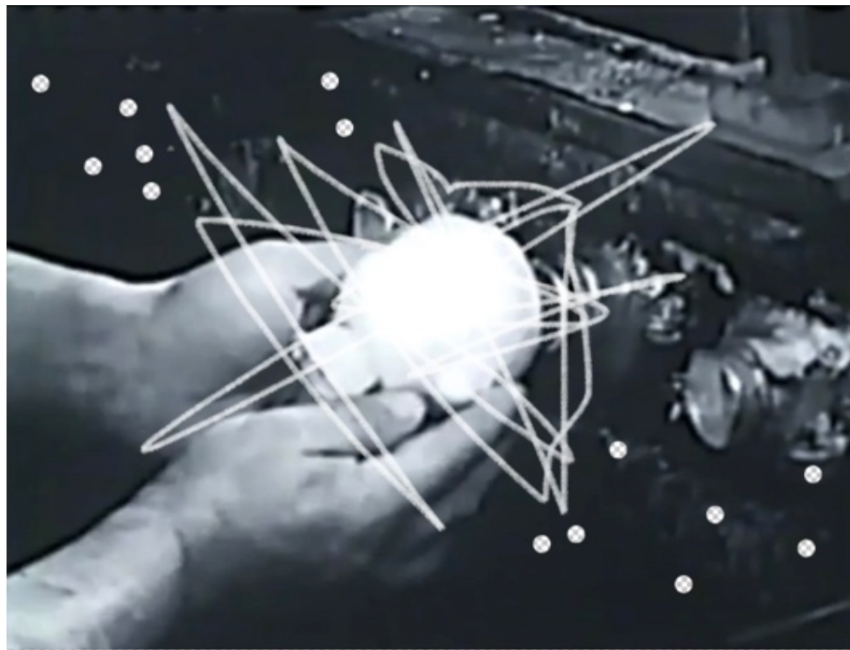


Fig 3. *OUR DOLLY*, Rhea Lempert (2022)

Although I was able to establish a conceptual point of interest through 2D collage, I felt limited by what I understood the form to be. I felt constrained by only being able to engage an audience through visual work, thus meaning I had less faith in the ambiguity of the messages in my physical work. Each disturbed portrait would lead an audience to conclude the tone of a piece based on the subject within it, rather than presenting as work that created a space for reflection. I wanted my work to be personal, self-indulgent, yet lonely and anonymous at the same time. By taking my knowledge and experimentation with collage, and breaking it down as a conceptual term, rather than making a process, I felt I had coined an umbrella term to fit my practice. It felt important to me that collage should be regarded as an act of joining, layering and intertextualising. A term that encouraged borrowing and reworking. Collage may present itself on a dinner plate as sausages, mash, peas and gravy, just as much as it does in 2D form on paper. It is down to the curation, and the artistic presence behind it, consciously aware of what ideas or physical materials complement and juxtapose one another. Collage allows for a space of orchestration, and for atmosphere to be achieved through collaboration. Rona Cran's text *'Collage In Twentieth Century Art Literature And Culture'*, is one of the few texts I could find concerning itself with alternate takes on collage. Reading over Cran's ideas solidified various findings of my own, throughout the text, parallels between forms are highlighted. Similar collagic processes occur throughout visual art, literature and culture. I felt excited by these unique conclusions and developments that had arisen in my work, yet challenged in deciding a possible practical route to showcase this through my practice.

Bonsoir, by Ithell Colquhoun, is an unfinished zine consisting of various black and white collaged images conveying connotations of old Hollywood glamour. This zine was intended to act as a storyboard or sketchbook illustrating ideas of a film Ithell never made. I felt very connected to Colquhoun's work, and particularly struck by the transference from 2D collage to film. My first film fragment, *OUR DOLLY*, (fig. 3) is a looping silent film, following a stop motion process. I began by selecting archived footage, from archive.org, a website acting as a library of inspiration via original free to use content ranging from documents, software, soundbites, photographs and videos. I had found a demo video from the 60's showing the process of doll making. Fragmenting a section of the video, I captured every second as a separate image. Then printing these out, disrupting these fragments with hand-drawn illustration and removing every other image. I had then scanned these fragments and remade the video using video editing software. The result was a jolty black and white looping short film with swinging doll legs and exploding doll heads. It was a successful result in demonstrating my abilities to merge my existing collagic approach to filmmaking. On the other hand, I did recognise an absence of sound, which felt like a missing part in creating a suspended reality sensory space.

I had always been interested in the mechanics of filmmaking and was particularly influenced by moving image artists such as Malcolm Le Grice, Martin Arnold and Gillian Wearing. I felt that these artists, and filmmakers in general, are entirely collagic within their approach to creating a piece and have had defining moments in inspiring my current works. Through layering elements such as moving image, set design, special effects and sound, each acting as collaborative moving parts to a piece, filmmakers achieve an all-encompassing moment, both

palpable and memorable to an audience. Moving image is perhaps one of the most immersive artistic forms, working to achieve a space that an audience feels occupied by as if they are transported to another world outside of the everyday. My thesis statement laid out the foundations of my final project, occurring through research into the technical features utilised by both traditional and unorthodox filmmakers and artists. I was able to, and still am, exploring the significance of the influence exerted over those watching.



Fig 4. *CROWD*, Rhea Lempert (2022)

CROWD, was my first experimental sound piece, based on a failed collage sculptural piece that I had dismantled. I aimed to repurpose these striking images of characters by rewriting their narratives specific to soundbites. Through recording sounds from my everyday environment, such as documenting my own humming, as well as sampling excerpts of sounds from mainstream media TV, I applied a dialogue and backstory to each character. The film piece presents each character and their voice isolated one by one at first, but eventually, characters meet through

their overlapping soundbites resulting in an unlikely crowd. The final shots present a dream state space where all the characters are collaged beside or overlapping one another. A disturbing abundance of noise unfolds, highlighting a sense of how overpowering and jarring voice/sound can be. There are hints of Martin Arnold's work in my own, particularly in the black and white 50's aesthetics, and the ways in which he achieves distortion of sound through reversing, increasing/decreasing the speed of sound, and creating new soundscapes. I felt that the sound element completed what I was aiming to achieve in coining an overbearing, all-consuming atmosphere.



Fig 5. *HUMDRUM*, Rhea Lempert, (2022)

Apparent in my work is nostalgia. A phenomenon ever fascinating to those seeking comfort in familiarity. Central to my work are overarching themes of the melancholy, the mundane, phantom memories,

habitual behavior and societal norms. I began to understand that my research would not only be collected via the examination of classical cinema, abstract moving image and theoretical jargon, but I was to collect most research through lived experiences and drifting thoughts. In discovering a new age cyber trend 'Dreamcore', existing mainly on Instagram, I felt inspired by these short videos depicting familiar scenes, such as suburban neighborhoods, abandoned buildings and children's toys, paired with eerie soundbites. Figure 5, *HUMDRUM*, is a film piece layering both found footage and my original digital soundscapes, encapsulating a melancholy, yet recognisable state of the in-between. Through reworking a found home video of a farm setting, an audience is able to comprehend the imagery presented, yet paired with long looping eerie synth notes, I have met the mundane with a sinister lull altering how an audience would process and intake the visuals. My practice relies on a making process that requires layering, collagic in its nature and successful in its outcome of suspending realities.



Fig 6. *DOG EAT DOG*, Rhea Lempert (2022)



Fig 7. *APATHY*, Rhea Lempert (2022)

The sound experimentation element of my practice has become perhaps the most significant in forefronting my artistic presence upon the

piece, leaving the original footage redundant to its initial context. I found that the digital soundscapes I was creating began to veer away from using dialogue and speech, relying solely upon digital sound or overly edited self-recorded sounds from my environment. It felt important to disorientate an audience in one way or another, manipulating their senses through conditioning presence. Hauntology feels appropriate in describing the genre of music I create, inspired by the uncomfortable digital presence in the 21st century. I have listened to various alternative sound art, and taken from films such as *The Shining*, Stanley Kubrick, to examine how best to portray disturbia, interruptions to sanity, and notes of melancholy found in the mundane. Each soundbite created follows a mood specific to the footage I have curated beside it. It experiment feels successful in creating a ritualistic, chant-like sound piece, lacking in human presence as we know it. My only limitations so far have consisted of technical skills that I am still discovering, in terms of how far I can take a piece in alteration. I have recently acquired an Oxygen25 keyboard that has allowed me to modulate elements of sound such as pitch and tempo, allowing for a greater realm of intergalactic, unnatural sound to surface.



Fig 8. *OH ENGLAND*, Rhea Lempert (2022)



Fig 9. *Tax Man*, Rhea Lempert (2022)

For my final works and exhibition, I have created 4 short films to be shown looping on CRT monitors. Above, fig 8. *OH ENGLAND* and fig 9. *TAX MAN*, show a glimpse of the films I shall be exhibiting. All 4 films share an atmosphere of hauntingly distressing sound, paired with mundane yet strangely randomised footage focused on natural imagery such as people, animals and nature. The films will be infinitely

looping to demonstrate a lack of core narrative and present a dreamlike state, synonymous with anti-film. An audience will be met with three monitors in a light open space, each playing a separate film, with headphones to momentarily immerse visitors further. My final film will be playing in a pitch black enclosed space, in a room opposite with one seat, inviting the public one by one to spend as little or lengthy time as they desire. The decision made to keep one film separate will hopefully aid in further distorting a sense of reality. I will not include an option for headphones in the room separately as I have played around with how the sound echoes and soaks up the space, creating a slightly different viewing experience than the other 3 films exhibiting with headphones. I am content with my trial demo of how the exhibit will run, yet face challenges in terms of relying on the various technology parts to work smoothly. I have prepared for the potential situation where perhaps a media box may cut out, or a monitor will fail. To combat this, I have been able to borrow a backup set of all the equipment needed, as well as extension cords so that I will not face limitations of electricity points being too far away from the space I am exhibiting in. Moreover, I have risk assessed the space and it has been passed as very safe, meaning that there are minimal reasons why an audience shouldn't be able to have a pleasant experience.

Upon reflection, it seems that the key components of my practice have been informed by earlier limitations to the ways in which I was executing collage-making. Through reading texts, specifically by Lefebvre, Cran, Brown, and Morton, I have cemented an understanding of my own conceptual aims I wish to be apparent through my short films. Themes of The Everyday, The Melancholy and Disturbia, Excess Consumption and Hauntology, are evident in my practice and process.

Moreover, I have been entirely inspired both aesthetically and conceptually by the likes of Malcolm Le Grice's work, as well as Martin Arnold and Ithell Colquhoun. Through my films, I tap into a space of suspended reality, asking an audience to be open to moments of meditativity through a collagic approach to moving image and soundscapes.

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