

Finding Identity in Memories

Online book



Digital + Media  
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by

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## Abstract

What are the ways in which we form and build our identities and habits in both physical and digital spaces? How can our different uses of the digital expression which evolved from analog forms reveal traits and memories that we have forgotten or overlooked?

The way I define my identity through the analog media I collect correlates with the quality of the memories within my current schema, knowledge structures that represent typical instances of categories.

We interact with an infinity of objects from birth to death. Our collection of objects resonates more and more with memory and nostalgia as the years pass. Personal belongings express aspects of our identity, our values and our choices. As I dug through my collections of memories, mementos and memorabilia from childhood to college, I found memories of interpersonal connections solidified into a collection of cherished objects that have been with me since Kindergarten. This retrospection allowed me to maintain my self image, my desired identity over time, and to avoid conflicting narratives about who I am. The collection of physical materials creates another layer of retrospective interaction with myself in the present, with people, and with myself in the past. I created distorted memories to address the absence of a clear history of past interactions, which raised my appreciation of the objects as I used them to fill gaps in my memories with imagination.

In digital space, my habit of collection continues, but my relationship to objects and memories has changed. My collection of "flat" media, such as photos, files from Google Drive, and text messages, has changed how I view my identity, fixing and changing the memories associated with these files, and blocking both other memories, as well as the imaginative "filling in" process. The process of forming my identity changed from using my imagination to fill gaps left by physical mementos, to relying on selectively chosen, immutable images. In this way, the way I have collected memories has changed, and these changes have directly affected how I form my identity.

My artistic practice is to explore the formation of identity through the materialization and objectification of my memories in both analog and digital formats. When my identity is shaped by the flood of digital water, it creates conflicting narratives about who I am. I want to be the master of the digital brush to take ownership, and create my own narratives, rather than letting those digital brushes shape my identity for me. Therefore, I investigated the various expressions of identity in emerging platforms that originated from my memories in the physical world by observing the patterns of my own behaviors, and explored new possibilities for interacting with technology by carrying one's desired identity into both physical and digital spaces.

### Identity

My qualities, beliefs, and personality  
Originated from my collected  
memories, experiences,  
relationships, and values  
My statements and choices

### Habits

Rooted in this introverted identity,  
Repetition of my behaviors.  
Subconscious  
Grasp every single moment of  
connection with people in my own container

### Connection

Having an intimate relationship.  
Mutually sharing  
personal information

### Schema

A pattern of thought  
or behavior that organizes  
categories of information  
and the relationships among them

# Introduction 0



A pink jewelry box

A pink painted jewelry box  
the size of my arms  
contains my precious memories  
from kindergarten to middle school

As early as 2000  
Preserve my memories in material form  
Not a rare experience for me

The pink painted jewelry box  
contains old Korean money  
My parents gave me in elementary school  
Plan to save them for my grandchildren

My thirty-two "forever" stuffed animals  
with a heater  
to keep them from freezing inside the box

Two books of collected stickers  
As a way to showcase  
my aesthetic sensibility to my friends

A shared diary  
my friends and I used to chronicle  
our discussions of boys in sixth grade

Banga-Banga Japanese hamster pencils  
I never used once in my life  
And I will never use in the future

Forgotten hamster utensils  
probably should have passed down  
to my hamster-obsessed cousins  
once my own hamster obsession faded

*“Memory retrieval is an act of self narration about our identity.”*

Back then, I identified myself as an introverted person who was afraid of talking to people, but who ironically still sought out communication and interaction with people. I appreciated the attention I received from my friends and family, and buried the untold stories - which I was unable to share due to my shy personality - inside the jewelry box. These characteristics formed part of the unchanging core of my past identity.

Perusing my collection of mementos created distortions in the memories attached to them as my mind sought to craft its desired identity, portray relationships with friends and self identity, and avoid conflicting narratives about who I am. Some of the resulting stories might come from my current schema, but I have no idea which version of myself is true, because there is no definitive evidence of my past identity.

## Chapter 1

*“The way that I defined my identity in analog directly correlates with the quality of the memories from my current schema.”*



## Squirrel

Consider me, as a squirrel  
making a cracking noise while  
eating nuts

Constantly saving precious  
acorns Inside her expansive  
cheeks

Burying them on the ground  
Later finding only  
30 percent of the buried food  
The rest of the acorns  
sprout and become inedible

Squirrel Painting, 2005

My habits of collecting both  
physical objects and repetitive  
behaviors become a way of  
finding my desired identity. I could  
only glimpse the true memories  
whose traces are preserved  
in material form, as my mind  
attempted to avoid conflicting  
narratives about who I am.

I'm obsessed with squirrels. I had a squirrel stuffed animal with a pocket in which I could only fit a single finger. Since I couldn't fit my precious objects in the squirrel's pocket, I collected them in my own pockets to save for later. But I'm only using 30 percent of my buried memory that resonate with my current schema along with a collection of objects buried in the jewelry box, to identify and define who I am. I think and remember through objects in order to maintain self narratives. How I relate to my memories, and how the objects take the place of memories is all derived from my schema, my ontology and my orientation to the world.

We tend to attach both consciously and unconsciously to objects that are endowed with emotional significance and that resonant with desired identity, self-creating memories and keeping them alive, while all conflicting narratives of self are held at bay.

Gifts from  
Bangladesh

Interactions  
with teachers  
and friends

My obsession with collecting materials in both physical and online worlds was my own method of appreciating and cherishing memories of my interactions with people, their thoughts about me, and my expectations for the future Hyejun. The pink box guards and protects my precious memories. Throwing away objects that seemed to enshrine my precious memories was more painful to me than actually losing real connections with people. People change both physically and mentally, and sometimes I become very disappointed when I discover that someone is no longer the person that I used to know. Their current identities conflict with their pre-formed identities from my memories. However, the objects remain the same, and while the memory may have blurred away, the object still contains a glimpse of preciousness. The collection of objects started from my desire to appreciate moments of interaction with people such as sharing diaries together and showing off my stickers, and the behavior later became the representation of my desire to connect with people around me.

Objects that were once stored in the jewelry box include a gift I received from my friends at the Bangladesh International School. They gave me a small diary that I never used because I wanted to cherish the memory of the gift, and a plastic spring that my mom secretly threw away, perhaps because I was too old to play with it. My father spent a year in Bangladesh in 2001 to check on his clothing factories, when I was six. Before going to Bangladesh, I was so shy and afraid of even casually describing my day to my family, and I never had a single friend, probably because of my introverted personality and our family's frequent travel.

Bangladesh was a completely new environment for me. Even though I spent almost all my free time watching the cartoon network, and felt separated from my life in Korea, I enjoyed their food and their fun activities, such as catching mosquitoes in a water bottle and riding horses, which I could only experience in Bangladesh. I loved the bountiful fresh fruit provided by the hot climate, and mango was my favorite. Mango is still my favorite food, and their scarcity saddened me when we returned to Korea.

Surprisingly, despite my limited access to their language and culture, I managed to make some friends in Bangladesh. Art was my way of forging connections and getting close to friends. My friends really liked to see me drawing roses and asked me to make origami because my friends might have thought I would be good at origami due to my Korean background. They asked me to make some intricate origami figures from instructions, and I made some weird looking airplanes for them. Even though my experience there was my first time giving and receiving gifts from friends, I was still an introverted student who did not speak but instead created weird objects as a way to play and communicate with my friends. My impression of Bangladesh changed as I started to attend school there, and to interact with people. Below is an essay of my first impression of Bangladesh. It also includes feedback from my first grade teacher, which I really appreciated.

윤혜준  
방글라데시  
2001년 8월 19일

우리 아빠가 계신 방글라데시는 내가 지금까지 여행했던 나라들 하고는 조금 다른 나라였습니다. 2층 버스에는 사람들이 한 손으로 매달려 있었고, 기차지붕 위에는 사람들이 앉아 있었습니다. 우리 아빠가 계신 집은 경찰관 아저씨옷을 입은 경비아저씨가 지키고 있었습니다. 과일을 사러 시장에 갔더니 조그만 아이들이 바구니를 들어 주겠다고 쫓아 다녔습니다. 거지들도 있었습니다. 방글라데시는 조금 지저분했지만 재미있는 나라였습니다.

김영호  
일학년 선생님  
2001년 8월 19일

일기를 잘 썼구나! 네 일기를 보면서 선생님도 방글라데시를 한 번 꼭 가봐야 겠다는 생각이 들었다.

5+++!!!\*\*thumbs up

Hyejun Youn  
Bangladesh  
9/19/2001

My father is in Bangladesh, it's a place that is very different from countries I have visited so far. People were holding on a second floor bus, and people were sitting on the rooftop of a train. The house where my father stays is secured by police. I went to a market to buy fruits, and children holding a basket kept following us to carry our fruits for us. Bangladesh is a bit dirty, yet a very interesting country.

Yongho Kim  
First grade  
teacher  
9/19/2001

You wrote your diary very thoughtfully! While reading your weekly diary, I thought I should also visit Bangladesh once.

5+++!!!\*\*thumbs up

## Gifts from Bangladesh

The descriptions above are definitely not accurate, yet based on this short school essay (which I kept for years), I identified myself as a shy person who loves mango, all of which may be traits that reflect more how I thought of myself, rather than how I really was. I call my friends in Bangladesh my "first friends" to cherish and appreciate that important memory, even though I know I probably had earlier playmates in Korea. I always cherished my teacher's compliments, and the extra little notes she made on my work. However, my friends who read the diary commented that this feedback was "emotionless." As I look back now, I realize his notes could have been the same rote, mundane feedback that he scribbled repetitively to every other student in class. But at the time, I might have convinced myself that I was receiving special attention from the teacher. The objectified memories that I kept in my pockets and in my jewelry box all lacked a clear history of interaction, thus helping me imaginatively abstract and reform those memories, and ultimately raising my appreciation of the objects as I used them to fill eidetic gaps.



Bangladesh Bus, 2001

\*Eidetic (vivid mental images) memory refers to photographic memory, or perfect memory

## Daydreaming

Daydreaming was my own habit of filling in the gaps of my memories and narrating the formative stories of my identity in my own imaginary theater. Since Kindergarten, I have daydreamed pretty much constantly, especially in class, while walking or talking to my friends, and before going to bed, as a way to escape from reality.

My imagined worlds contained crowded cities, alien planets, imaginary friends with diverse personalities, and even friends from my real life - all interacting in distinct and myriad episodes within my daydreamed universe. The world was formed from my infinite pockets of collected memories. It was one of the few ways to fulfill my desire to interact with people in ways that I could never do well in real life.

As I got older, the jewelry box changed its form to comprise formless daydreaming; I collect episodes that happened around me in my daydream and added another layer of story in accordance with my desired identity. There, my identity evolved from who I am to who I wanted to be: I identified my imaginary self as a charismatic yet quiet person with superpowers such as communicating with plants and manipulating chakra. I admitted to myself that I was shy and quiet yet rationalized that a deep meaning undergirded that quietness - a masculine stoicism characteristic of my name, Hyejun, which a lot of Koreans mistakenly think is a male's name. However, this world was still hidden inside my head, just like the jewelry box, and never shared with my family and friends, because I did not want my internal world to be judged and ruined by exogenous forces. I only provided a glimpse of this imaginary world in my essay in order to ensure its continued esoteric existence, since it quickly got erased and altered due to its formlessness.



My Dream, 2004

## I carry my dreams

I carry dreams from reality  
Indistinguishable  
vivid and realistic  
imagination

I carry dreams of my inner world  
I create the personality of my friends  
I create the feeling of the soil  
I create the smell of the leaf

My secret oasis  
A simple escape from  
Sometimes fearful  
Sometimes boring reality

I carry dreams for myself  
infinitely exciting and engaging  
Revealing the unconscious things  
I carry in my head  
my hopes, my nature, and my emotions

## I carry my dreams

Just as the short poem revealed, I replaced my "daydream" with a newly construed "dream" to serve as a guardian of my imaginary world, because dreaming sounded more mature for a senior highschool student. I did not want to reveal the embarrassing episodes of my daydreaming in which I was always the center of every event, the identity who was the creator of those dreamed environments, or the characters - slightly plagiarized from my friends' personalities - who inhabited those scenes. In the imaginary world, I called myself Haruka - a Japanese-sounding name - because I was obsessed with Japanese Manga. I think I mixed two female manga characters - Hinata and Sakura - to come up with the name. Haruka was always alone, but she enjoyed the loneliness, or at least she pretended to. Everyone was scared of her presence and her powers, but later in the story everyone came to like and appreciate her. I believed sharing this secret identity with people would expose the imaginary world and cause my trees, my oasis, my friends, and my identity to vanish. After graduating high school, without any reality or reinforcement, my imaginary friends and my imaginary world faded away. I started to adjust myself to reality, identifying myself as the average Korean girl reflected in my Facebook profile. Before high school, I had never used a smartphone because I actually preferred being an analog person who was terrible at using computers. Not surprisingly, my move from analog to digital collections happened at the same time as my move from daydreaming to reading the news and social media on my smartphone.

## Fingerprints, 2018

The interaction with my imaginary world was replaced with interaction on social media. I used to be an extremely conservative and analog-holic person who avoided using almost all digital technology, from basic design software (Photoshop and Illustrator) to basic communications devices (smartphones). I started to rethink my stubborn luddism when I realized that I was removing myself from interactions with others of my generation by rejecting social media and other emerging technologies.



The new world is flat, emits colorful lights, and displays preconstructed default elements from other human inputs that I never allowed in my imaginary world such as pre-downloaded imovie app. Elements that I write with, I click on and I scroll through, are all limited to finger motions, and the only visible form of my artistic practice of interaction with “the social world” was fingerprints. These traces are indications of our interests and sometimes our emotions. These simple gestures connect us to the world through social media and other networks, and thus begin to represent our intricately tangled relationships through these media more broadly. I tried to investigate and observe the meanings behind my behaviors, motions, and placements of fingerprints, and how they related to my real or desired identity based on internal interpretations driven by schema.



## Chapter 2

*The way I have collected memories continues but in a different form, and these changes have directly affected how I form my identity.*

## Artistic Practice

From observing my own behavior, I found that when people suddenly transition their behaviors, such as collecting and connecting with others, from analog to digital formats, they tend to maintain and manifest their analog habits as corresponding digital habits. I found myself collecting tabs and files while using a computer, which came from my collection of favorite objects in a jewelry box. Unlike my collection of objects that retain their physical form, collections formed by digital tools in digital space are pre-constructed with presets, and they automatically change and update through usage and other human inputs - a malleability enhanced by technologies such as machine learning. These tools include Photoshop and Google Drive, or they could be the formless emptiness of virtual space. When we allow our identity to be shaped by the flood of digital water, it creates conflicting narratives about who we are. We must therefore become the master of the digital brush to take ownership, and create our own narratives, rather than letting those digital brushes shape our identities for us. In order to actively engage the process of forming my identity, I practiced observing myself, specifically my behaviors and values, and identifying in specific situations those things that have caused me to change. I hoped to actively view my changes in identity. Meanwhile, I sought to preserve the flexibility of movement between digital and analog forms, and to revisit my collection habits in both analog and digital mediums. Ultimately, I wanted to use these observations to imagine new possibilities for interacting with technology.

## Reflection on Google drive photos

Rather than remembering what I did,  
I scroll back to look at all the pictures  
I took of myself, family and friends, a  
digital wad.

I did not know  
I had more hair than I expected  
My hair now is  
Getting thinner

I did not know  
these best selfies that I took In  
freshman year  
Look so bad  
With those pimples  
An awkward smile  
a short forehead

I did not know  
I look so much skinnier and younger  
Probably because of the SNOW  
filters Eyes are bigger

Nose is smaller Face is skinnier  
Rather than remembering what I did,  
I scroll back to look at all the pictures  
I cropped up myself, family and  
friends, A fictional character

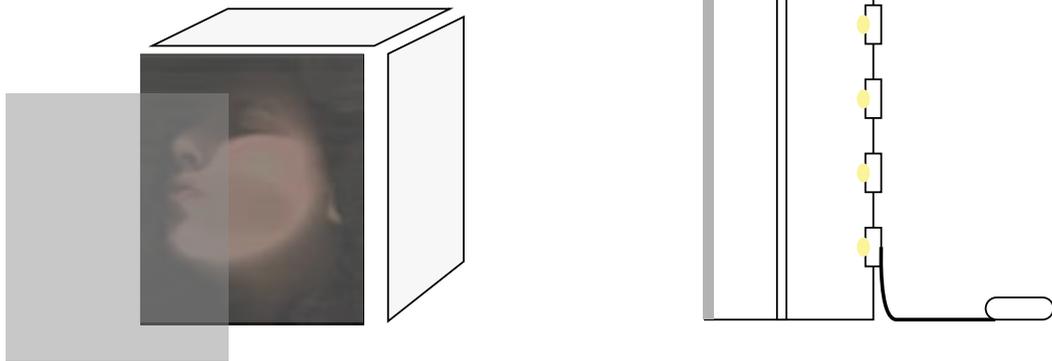
My unchanging "core" identity evolved from this quiet yet charismatic person to an ordinary Korean girl featured on social media - long hair, cute and conservative. Now I can no longer remember what I imagined myself to be, and I question whether conforming to the "norm" and photoshopping my photos to resemble other Korean Facebook stars as a way of feeling safe, should be a part of my identity.

This evolution resulted in my collecting habits changing from collecting physical objects to saving files and folders in Google Drive and on my Mac. In a sense, the pink jewelry box and the drive on the cloud were different versions of the same container. Physical objectification of memories helped form my identity as I used the collected objects to selectively form and reshape my memories, constructing myself as a person with superpowers and special artistic skills, and cherishing moments of interaction with my friends. The digital revolution allowed me to enter a new world of saving memories permanently, without them changing or fading away. My interactions with people are still preserved and visible to me, but in a much more real and accurate way, even though I might not want to remember that accurately.

Preserving seemingly "accurate" digital memories conflicts narratives about who I am. I often create false memories about the past in order to maintain my self image and my desired identity over time. I want to think of myself as having a certain unchanging "core." However, archiving memories in digital form presents an identity different from my fixed, past one. Fixed memories in digital form change and shift desired identities, while changing/shifting memories based on physical objects allow identity to remain more fixed. That conflict is an uncomfortable experience that the "normal" functioning of memory aims to avoid. By avoiding filling the gaps in my memory using my current schema in objects, I relied instead on my archive of photos and documents on Google Drive. In reality, my identity is not fixed, and that my actions reveal the real conflict and inconsistencies in who I am. The "real" digital photos expose this, while the physical object collections are too non-specific, and allow me to "fool" myself that I do have an unchanging identity.

## Hidden Space, 2018

The clear and obvious photoshopped images of my face and body from Google Photo have locked up the identity I held as an inhabitant of my imaginary world. The retrieval of memory I experienced from viewing previously-taken photos helped me notice some traits in myself that I do not remember - lingering hints of a forgotten or unexpected earlier self. The Hidden Space work reveals the behaviors of myself as an internet user who tends to selectively display only the best, most impressive parts of my life, but tends to neglect or reject a display of my actual self, with all my flaws and inconsistencies. The selfies and supposedly "candid" photos I take - and that we take - lack spontaneity. My photos are planned and fabricated; the poses are unnatural, and at times even the image of the person is distorted. These photos reflect a narcissistic tendency which contorts the face into unnatural mimics and caricatures of



The conflicting identities evinced between my expected self and my digital images result in the disappearance of my unchanging "core." This piece is a memorialization of my hidden desired self-image that is now lodged awkwardly within internet space. The digital self becomes real as the digital space becomes bigger than the physical world. Without a light, viewers only see a reflected image of themselves. When the light is turned on, they can recognize a figure hidden inside a small box, revealing our unconscious state and the cramped smallness of our limited digital worlds. Storing almost all knowledge and memories in selectively created digital objects might hinder our ability to remember. Too many images are likely to make us remember the past in a fixed way, blocking other memories.



## Chapter 3

*Moving away from the limitations and interference of technology allows people to find and shape their identities with their current schema in emerging platforms.*

Observation  
of Collective  
behavior in  
Online Space,  
2019

A collective space in the digital world allows us to interact with others in real time while seeing other people working with and responding to our work, often writing comments that appear quite rigid in their square white boxes. I have found that the default options of media platforms act as another layer in which technology interferes with the retrieval of memory and the formation of desired identity, generating unintended meanings.

The accessibility of the history of the interaction available on Google Drive allows us to view the progression of the work through past interactions, including crude early starts, some rude comments, stark strikethroughs, and stealthy erasures of my work. The intimacy and politeness of the physical world was replaced by the unintentional rudeness, brusque-seeming edits, and unemotive white comment boxes of Google Drive.

Does the history traceable in the interface accurately reveal the true meaning behind these interactions?

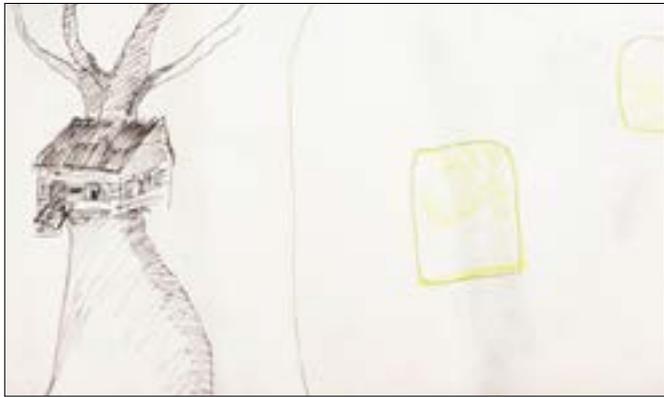
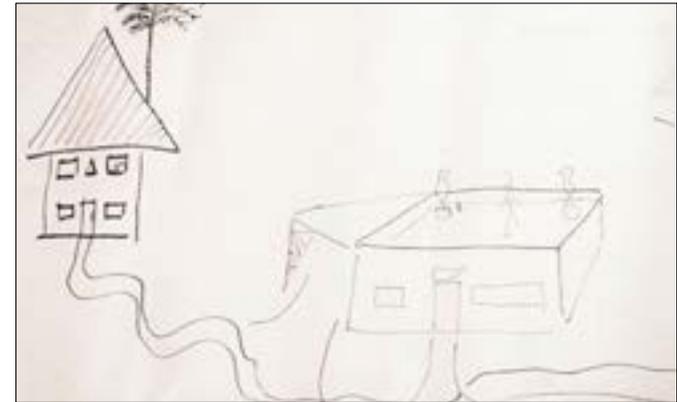


In order to find the presets that make people feel uncomfortable, I conducted an experiment to investigate how people negotiate their use of preset spaces by asking several participants to draw at the same time. This idea arose from questions about whether the defaults and current limitations of technology in terms of space and motion generate restrictions in the creation of desired results. Using the HTP personality test, I asked users to create their own house, character, and a tree. I wanted to investigate people's perspective of their self identity and how they reconstruct it in both the online and offline world. Does it facilitate or hinder the creation of an interactive community? Does either media involve more or less creativity?



Online Collective Drawings, 2018

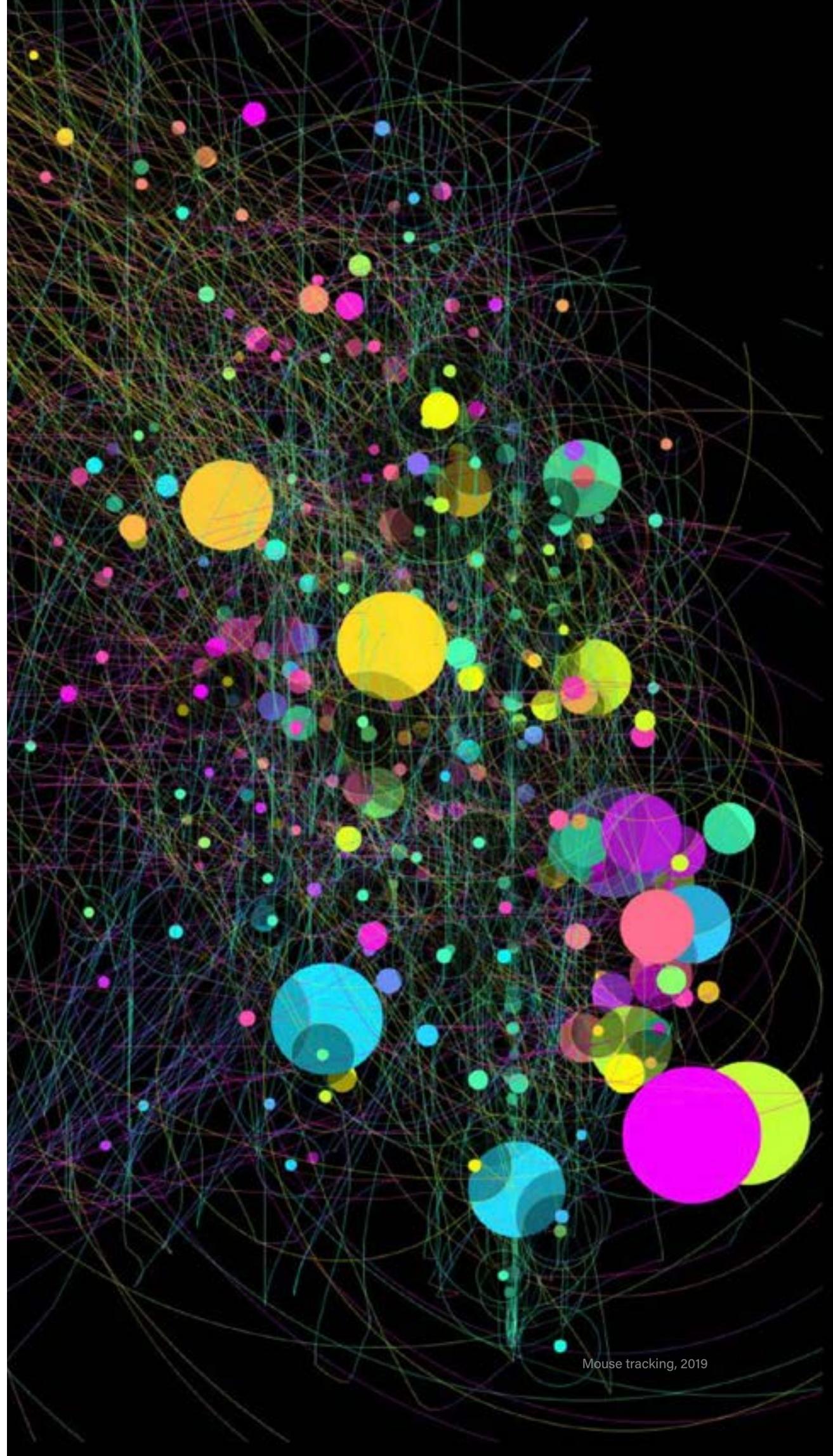
The results revealed that participants felt more uncomfortable drawing on a cellphone or computer than drawing on paper because of the restriction of movement required to draw on a device. They found it frustrating that people could ruin or erase other people's work, and disliked the lack of conversation while cooperative drawing was happening. The outer forces such as presets of technology and physical restrictions resulted in such rudeness that conflicts with their desired identities of being polite and collaborative. Therefore, I decided to avoid space that restricts movement, and causes interferences from others that conflict with the formation of desired identity by generating unintended meanings.



Collective Drawing with 10 people, 2019



Collective Drawing in Online space with 10 people, 2019

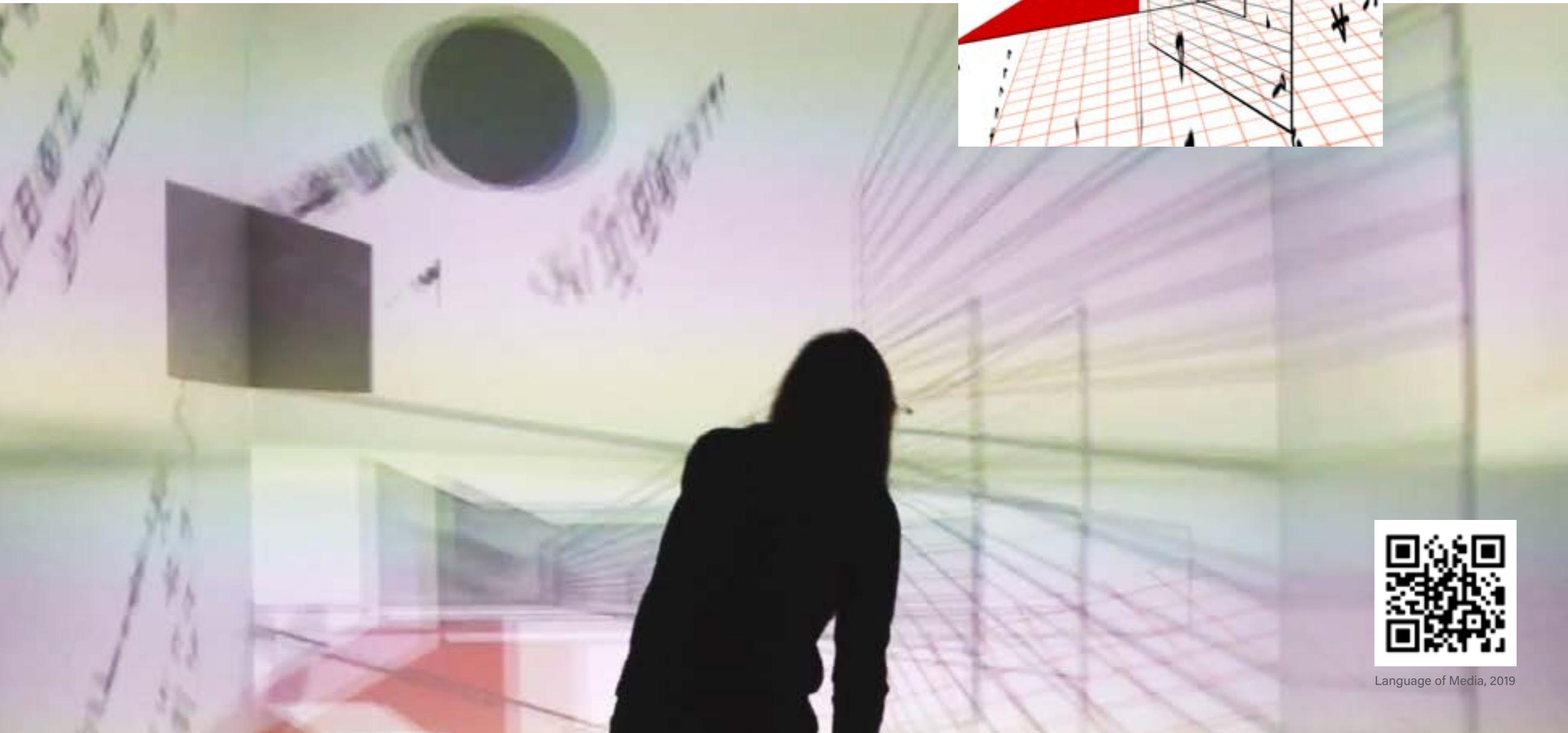
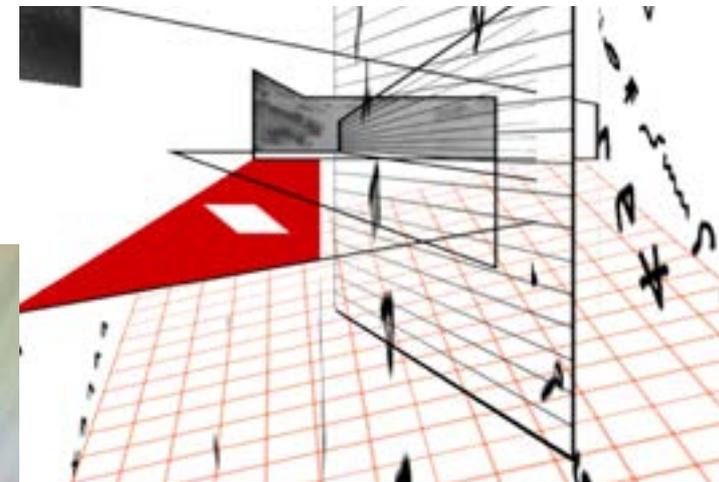


Mouse tracking, 2019

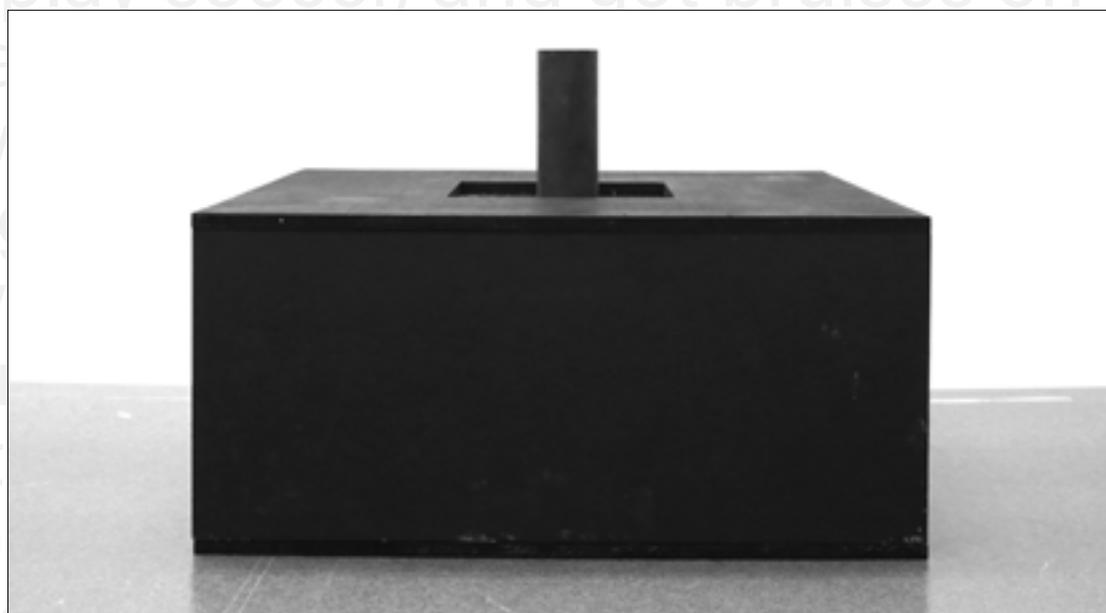
To explore the creation of a more comfortable space to shape users' desired identities, I tried to find a better interface that avoided restricted motion. I created a cyberspace in a Cave, a 3D four-wall audiovisual environment, to function almost like the agora of ancient Greece. People share and communicate their ideas using texts and images through the anonymity of 3D space.

I explored the words we use as a way to find our identities because one of the most salient conscious and unconscious sources of change embedded in our daily life is our use of language. When we are exposed to online platforms, our gestures are limited to typing on a keyboard or clicking a mouse and these limitations of behaviors and emergence of different interfaces result in the transformation of the structure of language, the content of language, and even our behaviors with respect to language. The frequent use of ultra-brief social media, or media that allows for social interaction through ultra-brief messages promotes rapid and relatively shallow thought, and is associated with cognitive and moral shallowness (Nicholas Carr, 2010).

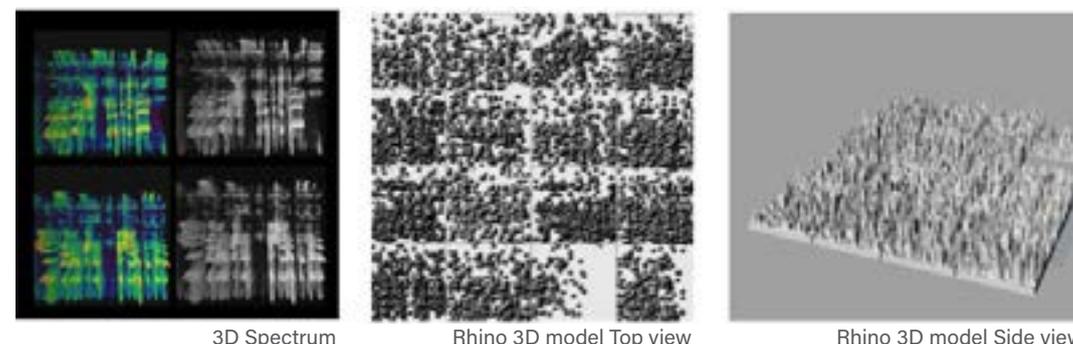
Users recognize their behaviors and change their language as they abbreviate words and adjust syntax based on their interaction with the Cave. People continuously selected words and received different animation effects that instigated them to move their bodies from the Cave without any conflict with people. I believe that the human body is the ultimate interface between the mind and the machine. Avoiding a body representation in the Cave creates less interference with the connection to the physical body. This type of (non)imaged embodiment can allow users to remain in touch with their inner conception of their own native, imagined self (Davies 1995). Therefore, the cave became a more flexible space where people can comfortably use their full bodies to explore and observe immersive images and text, and encourage the formation of desired identity within 3D space.



My voice recorded diary, 2019



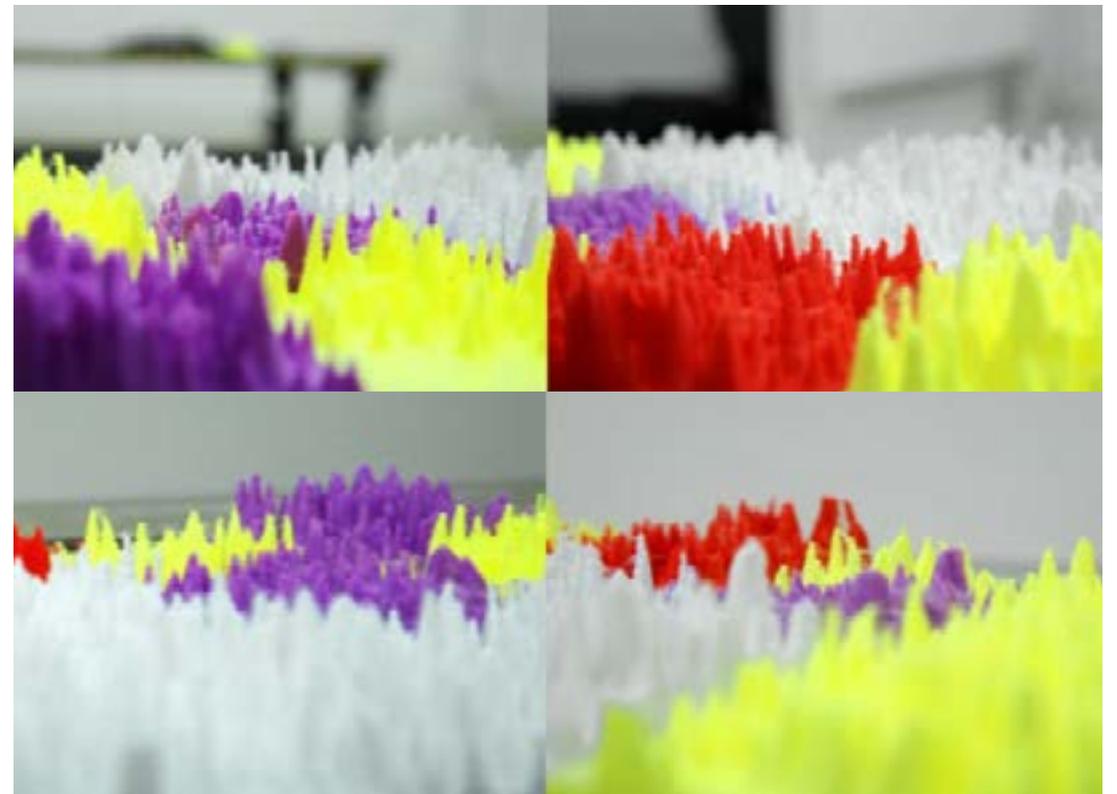
Continuing my practice of self and group observations, I found myself to be moving away from my identity saved in Google Photo: a conservative Korean girl with long hair. Instead, I tried to explore my own ways to manifest my desired identity in a space without any physical restriction. My approach was to find and discover my identity that is lost or altered in a digital world using both analog and digital formats. Our identity is not only formed from images, but also from the words we use, and the recordings we make of our thoughts and memories. As our means of communication also undergo significant change through the constant development of evolving cultural interfaces, the content and form of what we communicate change as well.



As a means of documenting one manifestation of this change, I recorded my days and emotions in an audio diary. I decided to create a way to visualize from text to three dimensional objects using a modern-day interface, and used text analysis based on the IBM tone analyzer API as a starting point. Such applications can capture some unwritten elements of emotional life through the practice of this interpretive aesthetic modeling. Through the transcoding or the transformation of speech into the visualized media and computer data of my work, I wanted to create a composite “blend of human and computer meanings” (Manovich, 36). I voice recorded the diary that I wrote for a month, which contained some of my emotional responses to events that happened in my life, and visualized it using a 3D spectrum based on a sonic model of the sound of my voice. I transformed my recorded voice into computer data, then allowed a tone analyzer to automatically generate corresponding visual imagery and analyze the tone of my text. I created my own collection of objects that remind me of previous incidents and emotions I have experienced. However, the objects were not the actual objects that I interacted with but instead 3D printed copies of my voice. Furthermore, I did not want my past experiences to be judged by the five limited presets from tone analyzer API, because my emotions and thoughts are more complicated than sad, happy, excited, nervous, and depressed. I found the presets were blocking me from generating what I want to make freely.



3D Printed Diary, 2018



3D Printed Diary, 2018

## Gan Image Generator

My other approach was to visualize my diary and generate images using a gan generator and a machine learning system. The large dataset used to construct the images was already collected from millions of photos from the internet, and the process generated images that I did not imagine or expect. The images of my identity are extremely violent and grotesque, which does not resonate with my desired identity of being a quiet and shy person.

The resulting images were very abstract, generating a depressing mood reminiscent of the uncanny valley, the feeling of strangeness from looking at a human-like, computer-generated figure. As I looked more closely at each image, I tried to find some meaning in the deformed shapes, almost like imagining images from abstract decalcomania, a technique of pressing paint between two surfaces, bringing the unconscious mind to the surface. I believed these abstract images are also gaps of digital product but still generated from thousands of images. Therefore, I decided to find a way to move away from the presets, and explore my own ways to preserve and find my identity using emerging technologies.



ML generated diary video, 2019

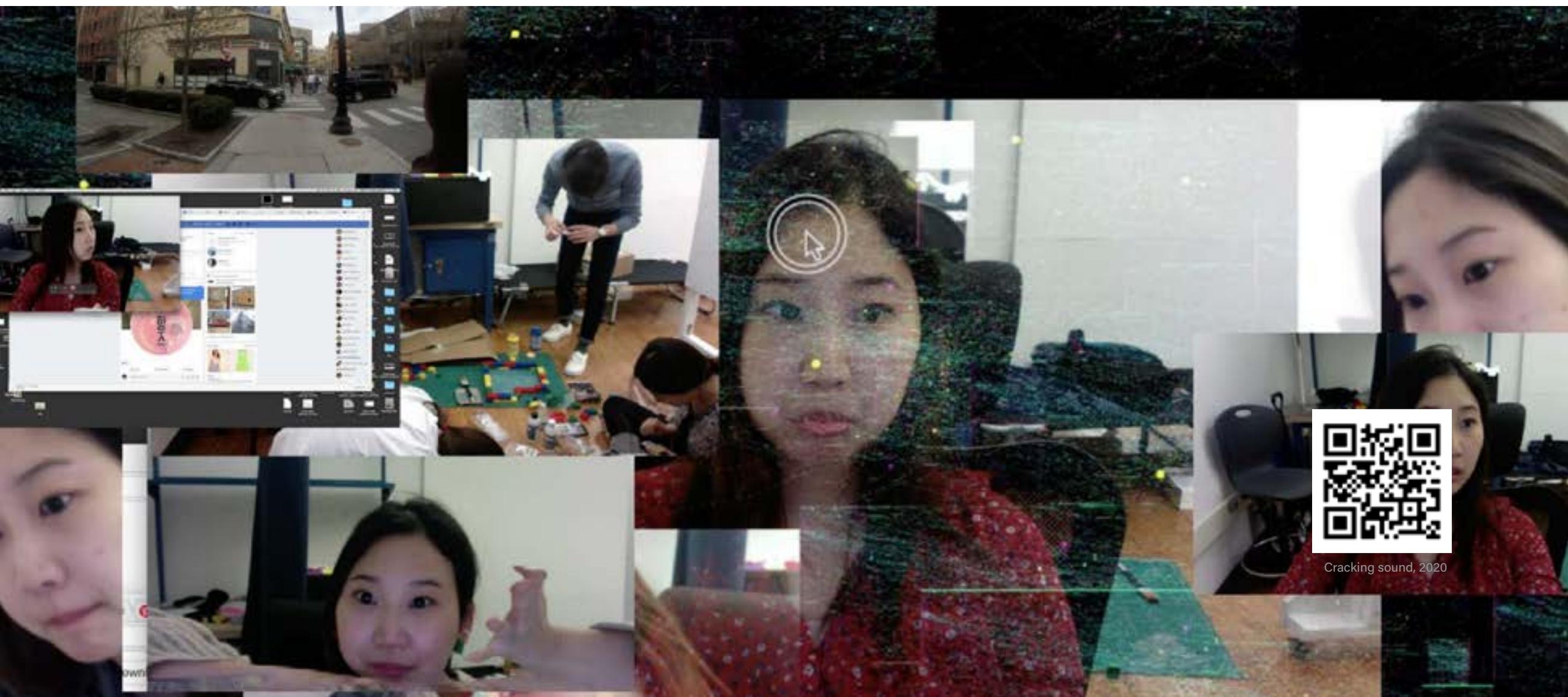


ML generated diary, 2019

Cracking behavior, 2019

Another approach to manifest my desired identity was to pull out the memories in digital forms to physical forms, and removed any visual cues such as seeing photos or videos that conflicting with my core identity. I created sound boxes that stored digitally recorded sounds of my body, each containing different emotions and thoughts. It later became an individual that has its own personality, almost as a weird mutation came from my body, to speak about its desire and emotions for me. Beginning with the exploration of identity through the materialization and objectification of my memories in both analog and digital formats, I discovered how my own habits - before I started using technology such as computers and cell phones - reflected my personality, desire, and identity. These observations revealed two habits: collecting materials in my own space, especially in the form of a jewelry box, and creating noises such as cracking knuckles.

These two habits are similar in terms of their existence in both analog and digital spaces, and their roles as cues for retrieving memories. Just like collecting precious objects to embody memories inside my jewelry box, collecting materials that I find important remains an integral part of how I work with technology. I don't throw away photos, files, or even website tabs. Therefore, I have tons of files on my desktop and tabs that I don't erase. I crack almost every part of my body in emotional situations, such as the feeling of being unable to come up with good ideas while sitting in front of a computer for a long time. The amount of cracking increases as I interact with technology and people. Each cracking sound produced from different body parts contains different emotions and memories.



For example, I hurt my right middle finger in high school while playing softball. Unfortunately, it still aches, and it has become a negative reinforcement for difficult situations. I tend to crack my right middle finger knuckle when I'm in a stressful situation. In contrast to the finger, I tend to crack my left ankle when I solve something or come up with good ideas. My cracking of particular body parts thus acts as positive or negative reinforcement to my emotional response to particular situations. The more involved I became with listening to the cracking sounds of my own body, the more obsessed I grew with listening to other satisfying sounds, specifically ASMR recordings such as keyboards clacking or wallets closing.

In order to preserve the sounds I'm obsessed with, I continued my analog habits of collecting materials by preserving these sounds digitally. I have recorded and collected my habits while interacting with technology using videos, but later, I removed the visual cues, which I found distracted me from retrieving the memories associated with my "core" identity. As a container for my objectified "sound memories," I created ceramics that are different from the form of a jewelry box as a container for my collected memories. Each ceramic's shape expresses my emotions and their corresponding sounds through their physical embodiments. The containers themselves have their own personalities, just like the characters in my daydreams. They have their own names, identities, and personalities that all stem from my own experiences and memories.



*The sound from my middle finger is called What the? She tends to get frustrated and stressed about her life and existence so easily that she tortures herself. . . Ouch. She constantly asks herself "what . . . should I do?" and shakes her neck from side to side.*

*The sound from my ankle is called Happy dance. She's the genius who solves all the problems. Then she starts dancing with her big \_\_\_\_ and says "Hooray" so loud. But maybe she says it so fast that others can't really understand what she says. Please tap her when she does a good job.*

*My unchanging "core" identities are preserved in different forms with each representing its own characteristics. Physical objectification of memories helped form my identity as I used the collected objects to selectively form and reshape my memories, constructing myself as the person who I want to be.*



## Conclusion

I have explored the formation of my identity through the objectification of my memories in both analog and digital formats. People often create false memories about the past in order to maintain their self image and their desired identity over time, and to avoid conflicting narratives about who they are. However, archiving memories in digital form presents an identity different from our desired one. Fixed memories in digital form change our desired identities, while shifting memories based on physical objects allow identity to remain more fixed. I imagined myself to be a charismatic and quiet person in my collection of materials and daydreams, but these features do not appear on my selfies in Google Photo. My new approaches to interacting with emerging technology while maintaining my desired identity were abstracted by observing and recording the patterns of my own behaviors, and creating collections of the records. Lastly, these collections of materials create layers of retrospective interaction with myself in the present, with people, and with myself in the past.

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