Connective Movements
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Connective Movements describes the winding, associative thoughts gathered from long conversations with colleagues and internal dialogue with writers, philosophers, and filmmakers. Using the visual essay, I follow points of interest through labyrinthine and idiosyncratic logics. Collage and montage results in an assemblage of visual ideas both analytic and personal. Although the outputs vary, my body of work has been informed by a sustained inquiry into moving image with a focus on small moments and subjectivity: cloudwatching can spin into thoughts on communication, or simple, everyday words burrow into experience and memory. With this aim, I use the constituent parts of image, sequence, and narrative to cultivate spaces for extended interiority.
The Horse in Motion (1878), a work of chronophotography assembled from a set of concurrent still images, stands at the beginning of film. Even seeing the frames sitting together, there is the implication of movement.

It’s easy to just focus on the images and ignore the gap between them.
This near-instantaneous jump across this gap is what enables the movement of images and the possibilities of expansion and juxtaposition. In film, the gaps are so tightly sutured as to be invisible, so this might be more intuitive in the panel breaks of comic books. At one point I realized this gap also characterizes the movement between ideas.
If I have trouble explaining what I mean, I tend to draw it—doodling spindly schematics. And that’s what I showed my external critic, Ayham Ghraowi: A diagram to explain my thinking in our first meeting.

He mercifully stopped me partway through my rambling explanation after I said the name “Heidegger” and drew my attention to the fact that none of these links were being demonstrated and, instead, were simply held in a fixed constellation of “just trust me.” Drawing a line does not make a connection. Each line indicates a connective move being made. And it’s in that movement that someone can be brought along with you.
I would describe what happened in my mind as a figure-ground inversion. Where I was initially focused on the nodes—the points of reference—I began to look at the lines between them.

On their own, the arrows resemble vectors. In physics, the notation of a vector describes two things: direction and velocity. It is a symbol of movement.
The vector’s single-minded directedness brings to mind Claude Shannon’s communication system diagram and its flow of information from sender to receiver.

As a designer, I often feel like the vector between the client’s “information source” and the final form of the “transmitter.” The message is linear and direct. But does communication always need to be like that: instrumental and efficient?
For me, rather, making connections is a process of wandering and noticing—a path of curiosity. I don’t believe the things that make life worth living follow the directness of the vector.

If I were to instead diagram meaningful conversations or long thoughts, they might look like a collection of strange knots. Vectors on acid wandering around and looping back on themselves.

The particular character of this movement is a fingerprint-like representation of the person in thought or the people in conversation.*

*I believe its personalized character comes from a combination of experience, emotion, ideas, and references each person has—any one of which might be shared by multiple others, but finds its uniqueness in the particular combination found in that person.
This wandering, questioning movement of thought is chronicled in Montaigne’s essays. In “Of Practice,” I’m fascinated by the way he moves from the inability to practice for death, to considering sleep as practice for death, to recounting a near-death experience after falling off his horse, to trying to understand how consciousness works during the experience of dying, to questioning his purpose of his self-imposed task of self-examination in the Essays.

Montaigne, himself, characterizes his mind as “giv[ing] birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself.”¹ And I find myself identifying with a mind that can’t control itself.

Visual Essay, Photo Essay, Essay Film—the “Essay” grafted onto different forms points toward something beyond a fixed literary artifact. “Essay” might be better described as an orientation or disposition toward a topic.

The title Montaigne gave to his collection, Essais, translates to something like “tries” or “attempts.”

In that spirit, this thesis may be considered a collection of essays: a series of attempts at understanding and connection—with both ideas and people. They are attempts to move out of the streamlined production of messages and into the non-instrumental space of connection.
When putting this book together and mapping out my path of thought through the territories that have caught my attention, the path became a labyrinth.

Winding and doubling back on itself, it circles a set of preoccupations, among them: moving image, language, gaps, the interpersonal. And the points along this path—the individual inquiries and visual outcomes—even have qualities in themselves that could be called labyrinthine.
Jenny Odell’s description of the labyrinth as “attention holding architecture” helps to pull out some qualities of the labyrinthine:

“Labyrinths function similarly to how they appear, enabling a sort of dense infolding of attention: through two-dimensional design alone, they make it possible not to walk straight through a space, nor to stand still, but something very well in between.”²

The labyrinth—as “attention-holding architecture”—sets the ground for a particular quality of thought to emerge that circles a point of interest. It allows a space for a “dense infolding of attention.” I see the desire for my work—especially in moving image—functioning as attention-holding architecture; however, rather than the labyrinth’s two-dimensional design laid on the ground, it is the plane of the screen that is face-to-face, addressing you.
It began with a conversation with Kelsey Elder on meditative walking where he mentioned offhandedly there was a labyrinth at the Episcopal church a few blocks away. I had no idea they appeared in that context or could be used to reach meditative states.
Several months later, Sadia Quddus and I embedded a maze into a brick path in the attempt to evoke a meditative experience by disrupting the normal flow of pedestrian traffic into a more circuitous path.

We learned there is, in fact, a distinction to be made between a maze and a labyrinth. A labyrinth has one winding path, which enables its meditative qualities. A maze has many paths that quickly makes it into a game, which the project came to resemble rather than the meditative experience we were looking for.
This distinction would follow me over the next year as I stumbled across the form over and over again—in conversation, reading, browsing the internet. Each time I encountered it, the form accumulated a little more meaning, a little more weight, each time I saw it again from a slightly different angle.

I made Through the Labyrinth to exorcise the form that was pursuing me—to understand why I could not stop noticing labyrinths. I wanted to explore the form in a video essay, using a labyrinthine mode of thought. Reading the form through both personally associative and research-based registers, I orbited around film, myth, memory, screensavers, and any of the other inexhaustible lenses I could think of. I ended up seeing the labyrinth as a life-view: As a way of seeing and understanding the world.
Through the Labyrinth is a video essay that discursively explores the concept and form of the labyrinth using a labyrinthine mode of thought. Rather than being purely analytical, it winds through a series of different modes and views—including the mythic, the pop-cultural, the historical, and the literary—and pursues a desire to be transformed by one's own questioning.
Ian Kelihier

It was only recently that I learned there's a distinction between a labyrinth and a maze and it has to do with your path through it.

The labyrinth's path is a unicursal line that meanders toward a center.

The maze, on the other hand, offers possibility. There are many different paths that one might take here.

In the everyday use of the word “labyrinth,” the distinction blurs. To call something a labyrinth is to imagine something tangled and confusing. But for most of its history, “labyrinth” referred to a unicursal form. It wasn’t until the Middle Ages that one actually sees visual examples of mazes and the word itself doesn’t come about until the 1300s.

Instead, there’s a sequence of single-path labyrinths through history. Who was the first one to draw this? Early examples are found in Sardenia on graves. But how did it replicate and why?

One theory of the Cretan labyrinth is that it was a dance, so Deedalus—fabulous artificer and father of all designers—was apparently a choreographer too. I’m unsure of what to imagine for that …
“Field of Reeds” by Leo Svirsky plays
The single path through a labyrinth is known as Ariadne’s thread, named for the myth.

But that raises the question of why Theseus would need Ariadne’s thread at all if the labyrinth built by Dedalus to contain the Minotaur consisted of just one single, winding path. Even at this stage, labyrinth and maze seem to blur.

If you were to ask me about labyrinths before I knew about the distinction, I might’ve thought of the Windows 95 Maze Screensaver.

I remember just sitting in front of the screen and watching it run as a kid.

But looking at it now, the movement seems erratic and desperate.

The path of the labyrinth is different: It loops back and forth in a meandering spiral circling tighter and tighter toward a center. Seeing the pattern,

I think of the first shot of Kim Novak in Vertigo. Hitchcock has pulled her bun into a glyph that pulls inward toward a center that darkens to black. The form repeats through time, matched in the painting.
But the vertigo of the labyrinth is not vertical, it spreads outward. It’s the dizziness of being lost because we cannot see the structure that holds us.

There’s a peculiarity of understanding versus experience with the labyrinth.

To understand the labyrinth as a design is to see it in its totality—in plan view as architect-god.

To be within, however, is to surrender your understanding to the form itself.

But labyrinths typically don’t have walls. They’re usually embedded in the ground.

Two blocks away from my studio, there’s a labyrinth at the Grace Episcopal church.

At a different Grace Episcopal church 200 miles away in New York City, there is also a labyrinth that is a recreation of the Medieval Chartres Cathedral labyrinth, which was spearheaded by a woman named Lauren Artress in the ’90s.

In her book, *Walking a Sacred Path*, Artress is adamant about the transformative power of the labyrinth.

As I walk the labyrinth, I mostly feel self-conscious …

Am I doing this right? Am I feeling how I’m supposed to feel? I don’t know if it’s working. Is this a seven-circuit labyrinth? I’m not sure what the significance of that is … I think it might be five …
After walking it, I think it works. I actually feel lighter. Unlike the maze, the labyrinth does not try to trick you. The only choice you make is to enter, and I start to understand the metaphor of the labyrinth and faith: staying on the path that’s there if you look. The world becomes the labyrinth.

Other associations tumble out of Artress: unity, cosmology, the birth canal, sacred geometry. It’s a mix of Christianity and Jungianism that I actually recognize from my grandmother who worked in the Episcopal Church. I can imagine *Walking a Sacred Path* sitting next to her copy of *Be Here Now*. But it’s not a way of thinking that really feels available to me.

So. Maze or labyrinth. Contingency or fate. This is something Borges gets at. In “The Garden of Forking Paths,” Borges introduces us to two characters: Yu Tsun—an academic on his way to kill a man—and Ts’ui Pên—Yu Tsun’s ancestor and the author of the mysterious text, *The Garden of Forking Paths*.

I take Yu Tsun to represent the fate of the single path labyrinth. He says: “The author of an atrocious undertaking ought to imagine that he has already accomplished it, ought to impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past.”

Ts’ui Pên, author of the textual labyrinth, insists on multiplicity: “All possible outcomes occur. Each is the point of departure for other forking... in one of the possible pasts, you are my enemy; in the other, my friend.”
In the relationship between, we see understanding versus experience again. Ts’ui Pên as architect-god…

And Yu Tsun within the structure.

I do not want this either/or to resolve into clarity.

When I think about this, I think about Borges’s eyesight.

The way his cataracts slowly removed the distinctions of the world and if that might relate to his idealism—the primacy of mental concepts.

In this space, ideas can be suspended in paradox without need to resolve into one or the other.

I think about the way distinctions like maze or labyrinth, contingency or fate, might blur together in this sort of world.

I feel a hunger for a paradoxical labyrinth-maze. To allow multiplicity and agency but also feel the security of Ariadne’s thread in my hand.
I think of another project that was set off by a similar experience of noticing and following. While working on something else, I see a sequence of images of my classmate Lian Fumerton-Liu throwing a rock at the beach. There’s something I find moving in the gesture that I can’t explain. I ask her if she minds if I rotoscope the sequence and use it.
Looking at Lian’s image brought up images of the Pacific Northwest, a childhood in rubber boots.

Feeling the limitation of instrumental communication, I wanted to draw out the experiences embedded in simple words. I wanted to know, do we feel echoes of past events everytime we say the word “rock” or “tree?”
In Words

Video, Sound 02:17
Featuring: Lian Fumerton-Liu (GD MFA '23)
Ásta Frætidóttir (GD MFA '22)
Moritz Lónyay (GD MFA '23)
Sadia Quddus (GD MFA '23)

In Words is a video exploring interiority and the personal, experiential dimension of language in contrast to taxonomic language systems such as dictionaries. I derived the content from conversations with four colleagues that were part open, winding conversation and part word association, which resulted in a set of personal definitions. From these interviews, I rotoscoped the footage and added my own associative layer to their thoughts.
Conversation with Lian Fumerton-Liu

I think all my object associations are memory-based.

Not memory based but not specific moments in time.

That's just the way I like . . .

TREE /tri/n.
I feel like I’m a person who like when I go back to California and I see certain trees …
I feel nostalgic...
DANCE / dans / n.

There’s a certain sense of lightness that I feel when I dance.
It's hard to explain...
I'm a pretty serious person
But this lightness and free moving is really something that I love.
ML
Cornflowers? Are they called “cornflowers?”

ML
Those I really loved as a kid growing up
They have a relatively loaded meaning—symbolic meaning—in Austria and Germany because during the time the National Socialist Party was forbidden—before they were taking over power.
their symbol was to put a cornflower into their breast pocket.

So it has a certain meaning.
some of the extreme right wing parties in Austria and Germany are now using today
and they're saying, you know, “no, we're just using the cornflower because we like flowers.”
Conversation with
Sadia Quddus

SUIT·CASE  /ˈsuːtˌkeɪs/ n.

Sadia Quddus
I really like the big skies and the sprawling land that I am familiar with in Texas.
So I had to just—even it was just like an hour away, right?—where I just drive to Newport…

And I missed that.
But it's just the motion in itself kind of restores my own sense of self sometimes.
It doesn’t always have to be like a grand move.
In investigating the experiential aspects of language in contrast to the objectified taxonomy of the dictionary, I found working with others brought me something I never could have found on my own.

The loose interview format allowed a space of intimacy and unfettered curiosity that would have been strange in other social contexts. My expectation of a word triggering a memory became something more open-ended, complex, and personal. Simple words called forth conversations that revealed interior landscapes: memories, experiences, embodied feelings, history, cultural heritage, or comments on the way their own mind worked. I was also taken with the way the moving image was able to visualize interiority in its mercurial, shifting presence.
I think of the concept of mise-en-scène—the organization and articulation of elements within a frame, usually associated with film style and the authorship of the director—as being tied to this. Cinema is a medium built largely on photographic representation of surfaces, so internal states of characters here must be projected outward upon the world that they inhabit. There is something that feels true-to-life about this in the way subjectivity is shown to mediate the experience of the world through the lens of fantasy, memory, and both shared and idiosyncratic symbolic systems.

The first time I hear the term mise-en-scène is as a teenager in reference to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), which made use of wildly stylized sets and lighting to articulate the world in which the story takes place. Given the twist ending of the story (the story of the film is a delusion of a madman in an asylum), the film is explicitly concerned with the mediation of subjectivity.
I attempted to capture a similar sense of the way consciousness and memory colors the world but from my own experience by making a photo-essay derived from a trip to New York City.

It was the night before the New York Artbook fair and I was walking with my friend Olivia de Salve through Gowanus, Brooklyn. Waiting for the signal at the corner of 4th avenue, it struck me that I’d done this before, many times before: walked this street under the city’s flourescent darkness. Returning to the city where I had lived for a decade after being gone for three years created an opening for memory that was usually spackled over by day-to-day life.

Using the form of the photo-essay, I wanted to capture this feeling of the present becoming a fluid veil, where the past rises up in unexpected ways. The camera becomes a way to capture a way of looking.
Now and Then is a small, silkscreened publication and poster that documents a trip to the 2022 NY Art Book Fair and the spaces of memory that were opened up on my return to New York City. I made the publication using a press sheet to be able to fragment a collection of snapshots from my time living in the city throughout the publication.
Photos in white are from my travels during the NY Art Book Fair 2022, blue is from my camera roll from the last ten years.
The publication also included scans of printed matter purchased from the fair. Far left is a selection from Mike Mills’s screenplay book for 20th Century Women.
The link between the camera and the eye is a trope in filmmaking. The fascination may come from the sense that a camera IS an eye, directing attention toward something. But I’m more interested in how the viewer’s eye might turn inward in the act of looking. How guiding and influencing the way you look can define the “architecture of attention” and lead to a labyrinthine experience.
I can’t help but think of the opening scene of Solaris (1972). Every time I see it, I’m returned to the first time that I saw it: sitting on a dirty carpet during a Bushwick summer after my first year in art school.

Watching twenty-three seconds of a single shot of swaying grass opens something up in me. The pause allows a gap to form that I can bring myself into.
I find myself repeating this same softened, slowed texture of looking I found in Tarkovsky over and over again in my work.
I’m trying to widen a gap. To open a moment of pause to create a ground for thought, a space for interiority, in which a small, gentle moment fills the room and allows for a “dense infolding of attention.”
Soon after making *In Words*, I came into contact with the thinker Martin Buber for the first time in a seminar. My amateur philosophical interest of the last few years has been geared toward Existentialism and Phenomenology, so I had been thinking of interiority in terms of the single individual, but Buber’s essay “What Is Man?” makes a case for reconceiving the self as fundamentally relational.
If I and another come up against one another, happen to one another, the sum does not exactly divide. There is a remainder somewhere where the souls end and the world has not yet begun, and this remainder is what is essential. This fact can be found even in the tiniest and most transient events, which scarcely enter the consciousness.  

Martin Buber, from “What is Man?”

Buber’s insight goes beyond seeing people as simply existing alongside each other. Instead, there is the possibility of a deep, fundamental dyadic and dialogic I-Thou relationship in contrast to an instrumentalized I-It relationship. I am especially taken with his concept of the “Between,” which is a third space that emerges between two people, and a quotation regarding this ends up in a future video exploring his concepts.
But I can’t help thinking about communicative gaps: places of mishearing and misunderstanding.
Or how images might talk to each other across this gap.
How two people that have been separated might make a complete sentence.
How friendship exists in this space.

(Detail) frame of Ingrid (Didi) Schmaedecke (GD MFA ’23) and Dougal Henken (GD MFA ’23) going about their day separately and then meeting in the park.
I believe that communication is taken for granted because language functions well enough for us on a day-to-day level. In the instrumental mode, there’s no reason to ask: How is this happening? What is sharable and what is irreducibly private? In what ways are we always together and in what ways are we always alone?

But if you’re reaching for a deeper, more vital connection within communication, these questions emerge.

So, if graphic design is sometimes referred to as “communication design,” it bears asking what communication even is in the first place.
Between is a split-screen video inspired by the writings of Martin Buber (who is quoted in the middle of the video) that asks the question “what is communication?” which led to two exchanges with Dougal Henken and Sun Ho Lee. Both Dougal and Sun-Ho had been making work that derived from conversations with others, and these interviews with the two of them were then built into a narrative framework about cloudwatching.
I see a sort of manatee shape in one.

That looks like a rose, right?
Melting Tar?

I see a snail!
I think people communicate in ... I mean, there's so many different ways and modes we communicate.

There's the verbal portion, the non-verbal portion like gestures, facial expressions, the tone ...

I think we spend our lifetime trying to get that portion right.
What really does matter between us is this conversation that we have leading up to this moment.

Like what’s happening right now between us, this feeling that we’re both sharing is the beauty of life: this moment of communication.

This is whatever freak infinitesimal chances that wound themselves through the universe to create us …

to lead up to this moment and this conversation that we’re having is what makes life beautiful.
If I and another come up against one another

Happen to one another

The sum does not exactly divide

There is a remainder somewhere

Where the souls end and the world has not yet begun.
DH
And this remainder is what is essential

SHL
This fact can be found

DH
Even in the tiniest and most transient events

SHL
Which scarcely enter the consciousness.
There’s probably a way in which [Kierkegaard and Montaigne] would’ve had richer subjectivities if they had been with their friends or lovers. But then it kind of seems as if the suffering is also what produced the beautiful writing that we ended up getting. So it’s hard to know.

Heather C. Ohaneson

One of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is that, since getting here, Montaigne and Kierkegaard have been two thinkers that I’ve been thinking about for some reason. And I think that it has something to do with the kind of work that I’m producing. I’ve gotten into this idea of the video essay as a form and the idea of the essay going back to Montaigne. When I was talking to my external critic when I was trying to figure out what I was doing, he was like, “what do you know about the essay?” And I just thought, “oh shit—I just took a continuing ed course on Montaigne” and it synced up.

Heather C. Ohaneson holds a Ph.D. in philosophy of religion from Columbia University. Her philosophical interests include walking, friendship, and play. Now a pastor of an Armenian Protestant church, she continues teaching with the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research.
about with “Of Solitude” seems to actually dovetail pretty nicely with what Kierkegaard is talking about in *The Present Age in terms of setting oneself apart from the crowd and I’m curious what you think about this. I guess the way that I think about it is thinking about individuality as we understand it—in contemporary America with social media and a consumer capitalist sort of relationship to individuality—it seems they’re after something else. Should a distinction be made there when we use the term individualism with Montaigne and Kierkegaard, do you think?

HCO Not so much between the two of them but between them and the 21st century?

IK Essentially—yeah.

HCO Yeah. Probably, I just don’t know what that distinction... it doesn’t immediately jump out at me how to parse that difference. I think both Montaigne and Kierkegaard would be shocked at the shallowness of the inner subjective life of individuals. That even as people here seem to be so, I guess selfish in a way or just motivated by self-aggrandize-ment, but we fail to see all of the ways that we’re really just determined by the crowd or how we’ve been flattened in our drives and desires and preferences and things. So that actually seems to line up very, very well. But for Montaigne, maybe also because he’s earlier, there’s just an earlier sense of subjectivity. I’m trying to think. It might be a little counter-intuitive, maybe there’s a more robust sense of selfhood in Montaigne than there is today, just because of how much we’ve been flattened. I’m curious though because you’re like fresher with the mate-
tial than I am at this point. What popped out at you from the solitude piece? Give me a couple... Like feed me a couple of lines and I’ll see what I...  

IK Oh yeah, no worries. Yeah, let me just go through really quickly and see what I underlined. Let’s see. “So where-fore it is not enough to have gotten away from the crowd, it is not enough to move. We might, we must get away from the gregarious instincts that are inside us. We must sequester ourselves and repossess ourselves.” And I think that language of self-possession pops up in Kierkegaard too. But yeah, I’m just trying to find another good... This one’s a little bit more stoic: “we should have wife, children, goods and above all health if we can, but we must not bind ourselves to them so strongly that our happiness depends on them. We must reserve a back shop, all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principle of retreat and solitude.” And then another line, that’s very kind of Kierkegaard-ian, “that the greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself.”

HCO I’m wondering though for Montaigne, like through friendship or discourse, how much of that self-possession occurs.

IK Yeah, totally. So that was also one of the things that I was thinking about with them... And I think maybe part of that was some of the work that I was trying to do or think about was about how to access inwardness in other people, doing interviews with them... I think that there’s maybe two senses in which Kierkegaard and Montaigne... Even though it’s about the single individu-al or whatever can be said to be in relation to others in different ways. One thing that I was just thinking about is Montaigne—just through his act of quoting other thinkers—is putting himself in relation to others. But then I ended up taking this class at Brown where we read some Martin Buber and he gave this reading of Kierkegaard—and it was something I didn’t realize—but like Kierkegaard has always been in relation to God. So when he is talking about the single individual, it’s not like the single individual totally cut off from everything. So there’s that kind of relational quality embedded in Kierkegaard. But then even at the same time, there’s this kind of unmentioned other in Kierkegaard where you can think of him as writing to Regine. And then I think it was something that you mentioned with Montaigne—his friendship with, I’m gonna mess up the guy’s name... 

HCO La Boétie. Yeah.

IK So I think maybe you mentioned it in passing during our class: the idea of Montaigne writing these essays as a way to speak with him. And I think that’s one thing I’ve been trying to think through is how to have this relation-ship to inwardness, subjectivity, the individual, but do it in a way that’s not cut off from others.

HCO That’s so good. I like that. Yeah, I think, to tease some of this out, it’s really good because for Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*, you have God is the third term basically mediating every relation so that it gives you a way of, I think loving the neighbor as the
neighboring who is other from you. So there's a sort of universality to that neighbor where it could be anyone. I'm trying to think what would be the most relevant part of Works of Love to see how the single individual is cultivated in relation to the other. Yeah, it might be good to go back and try to just look for signs of that.

But I think you're right in how you ... I probably didn't put it that directly but it's a really beautiful way of expressing it that it's not a single individual just cut off in singularity, but it's a single individual in relation to God. And then I think that kind of hidden other, that's really good and it kind of parallels in like potentially very rich ways to Montaigne on the absent friend of la Boétie because like the most famous line from that friendship essay is "because he was he and because I was I." So there's something you can do with that points to a kind of alchemy between the friends. But I don't know, in terms of ... If people wanted to cultivate inwardness deliberately in friendships or in relationships, I think you still wanna know well, doesn't it matter the person I pick or the people I pick to go in with? And there I'm trying to think what they would have to offer. Yeah. But you're right too, to point out Montaigne as belonging to this circle of friends of like Livy and Cicero. Also in the discourse essay, in the how to have a conversation essay, what does he say?

IK Oh I didn't review that one.

HCO Oh, okay. But that might be good to look at. There's a kind of conviviality or sociality to Montaigne that seems particularly French and very charming and I think is a lost art and it might ... Yeah, it might give some hints for; yeah, basically how to suss meaning out of conversations that you have, not just with yourself, but with others.

IK Yeah I think that's a good point because I feel that's something I've been trying to figure out and maybe the reason I'm concerned with this is because I feel graphic design does contribute to this flattening of people. But then I'm wanting to see if I can get something else out of it. I don't know what that is, though. And maybe that's why I'm kind of interested in this idea of inwardness. Whether you can get anything in-depth, actually have a bare conversation. And maybe that's why I'm also thinking about the unnamed other in Montaigne and Kierkegaard because okay, let's say you are talking to just one other person, but this is a piece of work that goes out and is read by many and what's that relationship overall.

HCO Do you think that there needs to be sustained engagement with the image for it to produce some of those deeper responses or ... I don't know because it's part of the issue just that people look and then look away or ...

IK I think that ... actually I think that's maybe why I've been kind of interested in video because time [highlight] becomes a dimension that you're controlling and so that's kind of baked into it. I think that the issue with graphic design is probably mostly just that it's typically a commercial artifact. As a graphic designer, you're thinking about mediating the message of a client, where you're given content, you're making a poster for an event, and so you make it look nice, put it out there, perhaps it has some conceptual or formal relationship to what's going on. I guess maybe I've been thinking more about what this sort of communication could be or what it could open up.

HCO Right. Right.

IK And so I'm like, "Okay, can you point to one person. Does that change things?"

HCO Right. Because this is ... I mean, this is the point you were just making about ... I don't know that the audience is diffuse.

IK Right. One thing I'm also thinking about like, thinking about these two people or perhaps referencing them — it's a big question—but I mean, like,

what do you feel like is their contemporary relevance, if any?

HCO Yeah, I was trying to think about that a little bit at the beginning ... That their setting seems so radically different as sort of models of individuals who pursued authentic selfhood. Like what kind of models are they? You can't go to some chalet in France and just have a library and ride a horse when you want or something. It's a different context. And I don't know if people, in terms of ... For Montaigne like that amount of just high literacy, he was able to get to those thoughts because he engaged the ancient humanists so deeply. So, I don't know, is it like a prescription that you have to study Latin for 40 years before you can have a worthy thought about your own relation to death or something? So that doesn't seem to be that relevant. And for Kierkegaard, he came from such privilege, I mean, he was able to really just pursue his sort of quirkiness through those walks and he would just sit and write for hours. And he could both write, and I think especially walk himself into and out of ideas. So maybe part of the question ... I think that their goals are very relevant for meaningful lives ...

IK Definitely.

HCO Having a sense of a self you've chosen. Okay, that I think is important but how you get there and how you convince people to let go of the things that first of all, they blind you, it's like, can you do ... I don't know what form allows you to do that, [laughter] whether it's an essay, a video essay or something else. I kind of liked what you were saying though about having interviews or conversations with people because those can have a really lasting effect.

IK Yeah, I think that was something that I found almost by accident, making things from interviews. I've actually found it to be pretty fruitful because I was feeling a danger about this kind of very think-y sort of individualism, and being trapped in one's head too much. And so the way that just talking to other people and just being like,

“What do you think?” has been helpful in ways that I've found surprising.

HCO Yeah, because the inwardness, it's not all roses and peaches or something.

IK Yeah, before we got on the call, I was just thinking, “Man, how different would their outlooks be had la Boétie not died or if Kierkegaard had chosen to be with Regine? What would this kind of inwardness have looked like?”

HCO Yeah, I mean there's probably a way in which they would've had richer subjectivities if they had been with their friends or lovers. But then it kind of seems as if the suffering is also what produced the beautiful writing that we ended up getting. So it's hard to know.

Regine Olsen (1822–1904) was Kierkegaard's ex-fiancée. Kierkegaard was the one to break off the engagement and echoes of his decision travel through his work.
My interest in communication and interiority in film leads to an interest in how the medium of moving image works in the first place, and motion seems to be key to this understanding.

Motion and change are intrinsic to the medium of film and its digital analogues. Where there appears to be stillness, there is instead perfect repetition of an image. The frozen images that make up *La Jetée* (1962) are really hovering there, hummingbird-like, beating their wings at 24 frames per second.

I’m curious if there’s a sense in which that’s true for all images—if fixity and stasis are an illusion. Whether motion can be thought of as a fundamental category, which opens up the opportunity for change, evolution, and becoming. Thinking through this, the simple fact of my body’s shifting relation to things in the world occurs to me.
John Berger, in the first episode of *Ways of Seeing* (1972), makes the claim that paintings are “silent and still.” From the point of view of the object, that seems true.* But from the point of view of the observer, one’s mind and body are rarely silent or still.

* Even this is a difficult statement to make as even material properties shift and change over time in relation to the environment they inhabit. Consider the sun bleaching of pigments, the damage caused by a roof leak.

It should be said the omission of first-person bodily relationship to an image is precisely Berger’s point in his focus on the reproduced and mediated image.

Berger’s point is sound: The camera carves up the world and represents it as a mediated vision, which has ideological implications. The natural metaphor of the camera as an eye covers up this ideological aspect.

However, I also feel that it’s a mistake to think of meaning and experience outside of that mediated relationship of the camera as being fixed and stable.
Through this lens of embodiment, putting a still image or fixed object into motion starts to feel less conceptual and more perceptual. Like making focus shift back and forth through layering.

A spread of Now and Then (2022).
Or designing an object that requires you to orient yourself to peer into it.
I tell my students... if you can take one class in art school, it should be a motion class because it teaches you everything you need to know about designing experiences. Whether it’s pacing a story, structuring something linearly in time, understanding how things move in physical space. It’s where you start to understand the sensitivity of communication, reading, processing, and messaging over time. It all starts in motion.

Lynn Kiang

IK

I’d like to dig into the idea of generalism a little bit, but I think before I do that, I’m curious while working at Local Projects, or during those first projects that you’re doing as Dome Collective, did you find that any of these methodologies or ways of thinking from video, filmmaking, etc, had, like, found its way to these other applications that allowed you to be a better generalist? Whether it’s thinking through narrative or sequence or anything like that?

LK

Well, I tell my students to take a motion class. Like, if you can take one class in art school, it should be a motion class because it teaches you everything you need to know about designing experiences. Whether it’s pacing a story, structuring something linearly in time, understanding how things move in physical space. It’s where you start to understand the sensitivity of communication, reading, processing, and messaging over time. It all starts in motion.

IK

Yeah, I was curious about that. I was looking at your documentation for your Krishna project and one of the things I started thinking about was that it looks like video for you guys forms PART of what you do. Like there are videos there—it’s a tool set—but it’s within this larger generalist framework of thinking. Being able to think a little bigger, you know?
LK  It’s always in service of the story. We always say we’re medium agnostic. It doesn’t matter what medium. But what’s the story? Who are the people and like, what would best serve the story? So if it’s VR or AR: great, we’ll learn how to do that and serve the story that way. If it’s an immersive film, okay, let’s do it. If it’s a physical toolkit with pieces and parts, we’ll do that. It’s all about the experience of the story. That’s the primary thing and all the mediums go back to that. They’re all tools.

IK  I’m curious if you guys can talk a little bit about that way of working because I was able to find a New INC interview with both of you and what you were talking about the way that taking on projects at Dome as shifted from like these smaller, clearly defined deliverables to more open-ended projects where you have the latitude to be medium agnostic.

LK  I mean, when you start a studio, you’ll take anything. We aren’t funded by our trust funds or anything. We’re like, “Okay, we’re gonna start a studio, we’re graphic designers, we’re gonna design PowerPoint templates for nonprofits, logos, print brochures—sure.” Medium-specific things that traditional graphic designers can sell, right? But as people start to meet us, trust us, expand their scopes, they begin to see us more as thought leaders. People start to meet us, trust us, expand their scopes, they begin to see us more as thought leaders. And to come in earlier in the stream of projects. We’re like, “What could be?” And that’s where we get to just imagine with clients. And then you know, at the end, there is a budget, and we have to, like, figure out how to back up into that. But the core of the ideas are there, and we’ve been part of that.

IK  So is it fair to say, because you have this more generalist approach where you’re comfortable with working with emerging technologies and have this range, that then allows you to create many different ideas for whatever it might be, which allows you to go a little bit broader. Rather than, let’s say, you both went down the route of being filmmakers where you’re like, “Okay, I’m presented with this thing, I’m going to make it a film,” you know?

LK  Yeah, I mean, that’s why we call ourselves Experience Designers. It’s maybe starting to get more formal or whatever, but we just needed some term that wasn’t graphic design, so people wouldn’t just be sending us identities and books. Like, we just wanted something vague enough that we’re like, “Okay, we design experiences. What does that mean?” It means that it’s all of these things, any of these things, right? It’s also the fact that Katie and I get bored doing the same thing. As designers, we don’t want our practice to be pigeonholed into one thing for our own sake. So we like to keep trying new things, pushing our own abilities, our own practice to do things we’ve never done before. We’ll take on a project because we’ve never done something like this before. That desire to be a beginner is still there. To continue to learn something new to keep myself interested in this practice.

IK  In calling yourselves Experience Designers and also talking about narrative, do you see experience design as narrative design? Or do you see those as two separate things?

KL  I think that we designers also use that word narrative very loosely. To maybe talk more about a “visitor journey” might be a better way of being more direct about what we mean by narrative in OUR work. So we sculpt the visitor journey, and we focus the experience in a way that that has a point of view about the narrative. So we’re, we’re very much designing that journey. I mean, it just depends on how you’re using the word the narrative. Because I think what Lynn is talking about is true, we’re talking about the actual content, the actual story itself, which is its own story. And then on the other hand, when we’re in our design bubble, we tend to think about the method itself, or like the act of designing as its own narrative. And so I think, well, what are we actually building? I think it’s more appropriate to call it like a visitor journey.

LK  For us, whether it’s linear or not linear, it doesn’t really matter so much as like, what are the kind of emotional moments that we can create in the work? You know, like, when you first arrive, like, what is the emotion that you want people to derive from that arrival? So it’s not about space as much as like the actual journey that they’re on.

IK  That’s really interesting because that makes me wonder do you then think in terms of like, large emotional moments and small emotional moments?

LK  There’s like the big spectacular “wows,” there are moments to learn. I mean, we call them “interaction models.” So there’s moments to orient, there’s moments to teach, there are moments to just be in awe. Those types of interaction models is where we anchor the work. And different experiences will serve different interactions—different verbs—that you’re trying to get across.

IK  These frameworks that you both are using: are those frameworks that you picked up from Local Projects, or are these things that you’ve developed yourselves?
LK Just like any kind of novel, new experience, these anchor onto something that you know already. Like, we often talk about is this museum more of like an Exploratorium where everything hands on? Or is it like a guided tour where it’s facilitated? It’s like these things.

You can make novel things, but we need to still anchor ourselves in worlds that we understand in order to get to novel experiences. There’s nothing formal. It’s more like what we already know that we’re anchoring these frameworks on, and we just conjure them. Like, maybe it’s about theater. That’s a framework to think about, right? So it’s almost like adjacent experiences to latch onto and inspire us to think about this space or experience differently.

KL We should mention we do have a formal process that is part of discovery and strategy on these larger projects where it’s not quite defined, where there are these sort of adjacent frameworks that we come up with. But we do put them in front of a client and say: “Is it more This? Is it more This?” Like, what feels right for this project, for this museum, or corporation, or whoever we’re working with?

And I will say that this language and strategy work—and Lynn can talk more about this—totally comes from her consulting days, where Lynn do you want to talk about that actually? You’re making the framework so casual, but, actually, it’s quite rigorous.

LK I mean, yeah, I worked three years just doing strategy.

IK Oh really?

LK Yeah, it was all upstream work. I worked at SY Partners.

IK So was this before Local Projects, or after Local Projects?

LK After Local Projects, before Dome. That’s where I learned how to frame up for clients to like, start imagining, you know, “what could be” because Local Projects had no process back then. This was a process to essentially walk clients through an unknown thing they were going to create and could spend millions of dollars on it. How do you ensure that they feel like they’re making a smart choice? Well, you do it with strategy. You do it with framing things up in a way that they can pick things and eliminate things. All of this was kind of the strategy techniques that I learned at SY Partners doing it for like, Fortune 500 companies and the kinds of things they wanted designed.

That’s also part of the designers toolkit—like how well can you frame an unknown? To show the possibilities of What Could Be, then a client could actually go for it, right? That’s also a huge part of the trust building that is helping them be a thought partner too.

IK I didn’t know that about your background. So, was that a big jump for you from going like actually designing and making things to where you were just doing conceptual work and trying to frame things for other people? And then was Dome a way for you to get back into actually making things?

LK Exactly, yeah. Local Projects was all downstream assets, SY Partners was all the upstream thinking, you put them together and now you have Dome.

IK That’s funny—that’s like another entire layer—like a jawbreaker of generalism. In a good way. Like in terms of, you know, being medium agnostic but then also thinking in terms of the totality of a project from how its formed to how it’s articulated.

KL Yep

LK We’re just greedy. We don’t want to be shut out of any part of it. It just helps us have more control of the final product. Like if you’re out, if you’re not in the room, then you just get doled out whatever you’re told, right.

IK So what is the dynamic between you two? I always wondered that about that with creative partnerships.

LK I was really nervous when I proposed working as a company together. It really felt like a marriage proposal.

IK Oh you were the one who proposed?

LK Yeah. And like Katie was like, my supervisor. So I’m like, “Is there gonna be this weird disparity between us?” Because she was my superior, you know, it’s so it was a lot of navigating, just learning about each other in a new capacity without titles anymore. And so the first, I mean, we’ve been together for about 14 years in some working capacity and now we know each other really well. She is my work wife. And like, there, there are things that from day one we appreciate about each other, and still holds true. Every January, we have a summit to check in on our relationship. And it still holds true why we appreciate each other and how we balance each other’s personalities and working styles. Sometimes there are things to correct when you give each other feedback about that—and it’s always the same things over
I don’t think we could keep going and wanting to have the appetite for more different new things if we both didn’t feel like our definition of what being a graphic designer is is expansive and not narrowing constantly. It’s actually constantly opening up.

KL I think that I now know, it’s so Lynn, and it’s so Katie, how things started. Where Lynn kind of was has a sort of secret plan, and she gets it done. And I’m with my, at the time, like, three month old kid, and I was like, “let’s just experiment, you know, just see how it goes.” And she’s like, mmm-hmm mmm-hmm. And then, a couple months later, she’s like, “So I have this other crappy offer from somebody else, but I would rather do our own studio thing,” and I’m like, “Welllllllllll. Ok ay! Let’s just do it!”

So it takes the chemistry of two humans with our different personalities. But obviously, you have to have that Venn Diagram of something that makes it work. And I do think it’s a combination of where we definitely have the same point of view about what graphic design means for us, otherwise, we wouldn’t be doing what we’re doing. Our processes, our life outlook: very different. But actually, we do balance each other out.

LK The second question is easier to answer than the first—with Katie, it’s the way she looks at life. She’s so much more of a like responsive person to whatever comes. She’s always more nimble and agile to anything that just shows up at the door, whether it’s a bad feedback from a client or whatever. She just handles it so much better than me. Whereas, I’m like: I have my plan, and if anything derail me off that plan, it throws me to this emotional thunderstorm. I’ve always said Katie’s the even hand on the helm. That’s what has helped me the most in our partnership. That’s why we still have a business and I haven’t flung it out the window every year.

KL So you’re the loose cannon cop of the two.

LK Totally, I’ve learned to at least not email right away with my loose cannon and take 24 hours to cool down. Sometimes.

KL It’s the same [for me], but the converse of that. I would just be languishing, being caught in my own thoughts forever if it weren’t for Lynn, being like, “We’ve got to get this done.” And you know, even though Lynn actually packs in quite a lot in her life, she still is very adamant about life balance. And so she gets me much better about time management, and not spinning in my thoughts and just like getting it down on paper to look at it. Because at the end of the day, it’s not a thought, we are making things.

And so it’s just such a reflection of our like personalities—the way we work and then how it comes out, how it rears itself, and how it manifests is stronger because it’s in contrast to the other person. You can have your personality, but it really comes out more when you have to like deal with your opposite. And like how to convince your opposite to get on this joint path where we’re both trying to get something done that we’re both happy with. So like our personalities get more extreme in relief next to each other.

And for the shared vision, it’s what we said earlier—just, it’s our take on graphic design at the core. Like, I don’t think we could keep going and wanting to have the appetite for more different new things if we both didn’t feel like our definition of what being a graphic designer is is expansive and not narrowing constantly. It’s actually constantly opening up, and I think that’s what video was.

I mean, I think do we genuinely love the medium of video too, but I think that was just like, constantly, like just wanting to test things and branch out, and not feel limited to being the best typographer.

LK The second question is easier to answer than the first—with Katie, it’s the way she looks at life. She’s so much more of a like responsive person to whatever comes. She’s always more nimble and agile to anything that just shows up at the door, whether it’s a bad feedback from a client or whatever. She just handles it so much better than me. Whereas, I’m like: I have my plan, and if anything derail me off that plan, it throws
I’m now wondering if the text-image relationship is enough to put something into motion by engaging the viewer—in inviting them to fill the gap to cross it. But what is the texture of that engagement?

Olivia playfully opens up the gap between word and image, creating a resonance where the two bounce off each other. In this resonance, I have a feeling of being taken somewhere, of one thing becoming another and leading into a different space that becomes possible in the gap between word and image.
I take a break to make a joke.

Now I look at it and wonder if it’s in movement. Like a New Yorker cartoon, the text needs the image and the image needs the text, but they hang together in a static tension.
Does confusion cause a circling back that keeps the eye and mind in motion?

No OnlyFans (2022) is a collaborative screenprint made as the outcome of teaching Serena Ho (GD MFA ’23) how to screenprint. I brought the text, she brought the image.
As a graphic designer, I naturally gravitate toward trying to make graphic design and film meet in the image-text relationship. Perhaps that’s why I find myself so drawn to *La Jetée*, which operates within this very relationship. Marker himself refers to the film as a *photo-roman*, or “photo-novel” in the opening credits.
In that spirit of the photo-novel, or perhaps its inversion, I set out to translate my first two videos into book-films, engaging the book as what Ulises Carrion calls a “space-time sequence”¹³ and to see if graphic design and film might meet here.

The translation for Between adopts the use of split-screen and subtitling to structure communication between two speakers and their reflections. In contrast to Between’s translation, the format conditions set for In Words were self-consciously hostile to the seamless translation of video to page. The more vertical format and mandatory 16-page signature per person required that the video and its drawings be pulled apart, broken, and reconstituted to fit the new format.
The book's spiral binding allows Dougal and Sun Ho's respective halves of the book to exist separately from each other with the spiral weaving the two halves together and holding them in relation to each other.
even in the tiniest and most transient events

This fact can be found

Kind of restores my energy

sense of self-sufficiency
and free-moving
I think what you can see [in graphic designers that move into film and video] is that there’s a very structured visual. It’s kind of like something in terms of like, beginning, middle and end, you’re designing the structure around it, you’re creating consistencies in the same way that you would design where your page number is. You think about transitions and your [visual] language in the same way.

Lake Buckley

I think if I remember right, you came into contact with filmmaking at RISD through an experimental filmmaking class. I was curious what it was that drew you to the medium and what was the moment of clicking for you?

LB Yeah, I took that class two years in a row because I loved it so much. A few things really clicked with me. One was that I identify thinking more in three dimensions than I do in two dimensions. So that was just one component of it where I was like: Oh, I love thinking in three dimensions and then being able to flatten that and have a lot of fun with what happens in that translation process. And that just felt really, really exciting to me and more natural to my creative process.

And I also liked having permission to think through form. Like my favorite classes were always ones where the way of making was the idea. And if you were coming up with a new approach or new way of making, like, that was the substance rather than this more academic or conceptual layer that I’m putting on this thing that is a more traditional approach of making.

IK When you’re talking about the way in which you approach something as being the thing itself, I feel like I see that in your work. It’s like suffused with a kind of vision. I feel like watching your stuff, it’s like—it’s not like a relationship to typography or something—but I feel like a graphic designer made it, you
know. Just because it has this kind of formal quality to it. And I’m wondering: do you think about the relationship between graphic design and film? Or do you just do you just kind of, like, make stuff (laughs)—

LB Yeah. Totally.

IK ‘Cause I’m also wondering, like, how useful that distinction of trying to think of them as separate entities even is.

LB I think sometimes I realize things after the fact. Like I am someone who generally follows curiosity, and then thinks about it afterwards.

And the distinction between graphic design and film is important if you want it to be important. I mean, they’re so linked. So if it ends up being generative to you to think about the connection between the two and, like, ask yourself questions that a graphic designer would ask and then apply that to film: amazing. I think it’s super personal. What do you find with your thinking about the two things in your work?

IK Well, I think … I think I’m still trying to work through it. Because one of the things that I liked about working at mgmt. was that we were working on a lot of different things. You know, it would be like exhibition design, books, identities, whatever. And I think that I’ve found video is a pretty good container for a lot of different things.

Actually, doubling back to what you were talking about with the two dimensionality and three dimensionality. That was something that I wanted to ask you about because I saw that Keetra Dixton was one of your advisors. And so I was thinking about the use of experience design in creating spaces. And you have a little bit of a background in sculpture too, right?

LB Yeah, yeah.

IK So how does that come out in set design?

LB Oh, it comes out so much. And with set design—with film in general—you’re always thinking about how the space is constructed, how the feeling of a space is going to change when to put light in it.

And I think there’s like a very, I mean, people who do product design and graphic design, and then move to film. There’s like a pacing, and a structure to the work that I think feels different than someone who comes from film. And so I think what you can see sometimes is that there’s a very structured visual. It’s kind of like the flow of a book: You’re thinking about something in terms of like, beginning, middle and end, you’re designing the structure around it, you’re creating like consistencies in the same way that you would design, you know, where your page number is. You think about transitions and your [visual] language in the same way.

So I find myself thinking very structurally about film. And the growth area for me is to push myself in terms of bringing more movement into things and also allowing things to be less structured. Because I don’t come from film, I’m never gonna make a super loose, poetic, rough skater film. No, I am thinking about things way more “what is the concept of the movements in this?”

And yeah, set design. I mean, I always wish that I could do more.

IK I was kind of curious to ask you about the relationship with set design as you’ve progressed in your career through the past four or five years. I just rewatched the, the illusion, the TED video, and I think there’s a shot in there of you actually being the person rolling the bottle that breaks.

LB We shot that in my Brooklyn studio. When I first moved here, I had a studio where I was shooting everything. And the first films I did, there was like, almost no budget, and I wanted to prove that I could do this so that I’d get signed by someone. And so everything initially was just doing it myself and I do think that is another reason why I connected to that experimental film course because I just love being hands-on.

The bummer is when you’re actually making something that’s when you learn, and that’s for me the most productive space to like actually find new ideas and it’s really hard for me personally to not have a space now to work and to have these jobs where I now design something on the computer and I have someone else make it. And so there is a lot of 2D life that I live now. I would love to be more hands on than I am. That’s something that I think I need to figure out now.

IK That brought up two questions for me. Number one was just wondering if it’s fair to say that when you discovered video, you found a form that you could really bring the totality of yourself into in this way that maybe you couldn’t in like, two-dimensional work.

LB Yeah.

IK But then one other thing that I’m thinking about is are you now making spaces for smaller scale projects where you’re trying to give yourself that space to be more hands on?

LB Totally. Last year, I didn’t feel like I advanced my own voice and curiosity. So this year, I would like to do two personal projects. And both of them have a smaller scale just inherently because of budget restrictions. But yes: wanting to, like, bring the scale down and bring up the creative authorship.

IK One of the things I wanted to talk to you about was this idea of Secular Magic [from your thesis]—or in a couple of press releases I’ve maybe seen it as Practical Magic—that’s carried forward. Is that kind of where your head is still at as you’re moving into new work where you’re thinking about, you know, magic camera tricks, editing things like that? Or have you found yourself starting to move into other different directions over the last years?

LB I think there’s some feelings from Practical Magic that I still feel very attached to, but not so literally illusions. There’s that feeling when you have an illusion—that feeling of like, surprise, or like originality. I’m
Connective Movements

Left: Frames from a trailer for Jessica Helfand’s book Face, which Lake Buckley co-directed in 2019.

Definitely looking for that wherever I can in my work. Like how can I do something in whatever project it is where it’s trying to look at something in a new way, or trying to create a cut or a transition that feels fresh. That’s the feeling I get from, like formal techniques that have a story embedded into them. And so that’s something I definitely am always looking for.

IK It was funny because rewatching your work in a solid block before talking to you, the word that came to mind was “delight.” I feel like our sensibilities are different, but it’s something that I really admire about your work: where it just feels like a very joyful person made this.

So we talked a little bit about transitions over the past several years, but it was just recently in the past year that you went from Creative Director to co-director to now just “director.” How has that transition been?

LB So the world of directing is hard to break into. I mean, especially coming from a graphic design background, I was like, Okay, how do I get a foot in the door? I don’t fucking know anything about film. I don’t know anything about the film industry, I don’t have people I went to school with that I can, like get together to make cheap films. I don’t know anything. So for me, it was doing work for friend’s brands that trusted me and didn’t have any money. And just like making the sets and putting that stuff together, to demonstrate that I could do that kind of work.

And then my mentor—someone that I interviewed in my thesis—has an agency here [in NYC], and knows that I want to direct. And so I started working as a Creative Director, and knew that if there was opportunities for directing work that I was also able to do that there. So doing Creative Direction was also helpful to just understand what the pitch process is.

IK Just to revisit the question of the mentor—I’m assuming this is Aaron Duffy that you’re talking about? Did you know him before you interviewed him for your thesis book, or was that a relationship that built from there?

LB Yeah, it just built from there. So, Andrew Sloat—who taught the experimental film course—was also signed as a director at [1stAveMachine where] Aaron was signed at.

IK That actually does make me think of something that I wanted to ask you: You’re now a director at 1stAveMachine, but you were also a freelance designer at Patagonia, and a creative director. Did you have this endpoint of like, “Oh, I know, I want to do that” and these things were the steps getting toward there? Or if it was just, like... Okay, you’re shaking your head “no.”

LB No, I’m not someone who can be like a 10 year plan person. I just keep working towards more creative satisfaction. Like I went to grad school because I knew that I wasn’t going to be able to like be happy on the career path that I was on and then after grad school, I was like, “I fucking love having the freedom to, like, follow my own curiosity. I love making work that I feel connected to, and I don’t want to let go of that. I don’t want to go back to making work for other people that I don’t feel connected to.” And that I think will always be the thing that I’m trying to figure out. So my path has led me here, and I’m still struggling with the same things.

IK Given that you’re not a 10 year plan person but now that you’ve found yourself in this world of directing, do you have aspirations to do certain types of projects? Whether, like, to do a feature film, or to do a short form documentary?

LB The feature film feels like too out of my range at the moment, but I definitely want to push for, for example, this year, the music video, and then I want to create a hyper-stylized doc. And if I could get that into like, South by Southwest or something then that would be great. But I want to do two things that I feel represent me this year. And knowing that those always lead to the next thing. So right now, that’s my—and again, you can see by the way I’m talking about it like, I’m not a 10 year person, I’m just like right now. I’m dissatisfied in these ways, so what I can do is do two projects this year, that answer that question for me, and then we’ll see what’s next. It’s the same with my making too. Everything is pretty close in front of me.

IK I think that seems like a better way of going about it, rather than to have like this 10 year plan of this really abstract thing that you’re working at. Because at least if you’re looking in front of yourself, you have concrete things that you’re working on. And it’s my guess is that you being able to get to where you are at 1stAveMachine is predicated on doing the work that was meaningful to you that was able to show who you were.

So are you thinking that if this work gets into SXSW, then the sorts of clients that are going to hit me up are going to be more in line with, you know, the vision that I have?

LB Yes, and even more than that, the more I do things that are true to me, and push my own creative voice, the happier I will be.
The way a book works with its stacked layers of latent images is not dissimilar from one of Sergei Eisenstein’s insights. In Eisenstein’s montage theory, he makes the point that film images are temporally superimposed upon each other, the current image in your sight held in mental relation to the one that was just there.

Montage occurs not in the short gap between frames that create motion but in the extended gap of image to image, idea to idea, in which the viewer must jump from one thing to another. Eisenstein sees this as a place of conflict,* what he calls the dramatic principle.⁴

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⁴ Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” p.49.

* Is there a way to think of this in terms of Buber’s emergent dialogue instead? Or do we already when we say two speak to each other when set in relation?

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A diagram illustrating Eisenstein’s notion of the temporal superimposition of sequenced images.
Eisenstein’s insights allow me to see my work again in a different light. My attempt to turn a poster series into a poster sequence through a recursive process of collaging and scanning lacks coherence. In the movement of collaged stripes, to scanned manipulations, then recombined into stripes, the posters become more of a record or residue of process rather than a sequence that moves an idea from one place to another.

The gap between is oddly shaped—in some ways too close, in others too far. I see them as a series of frames trying to put themselves into movement.
Repetition is a Form of Change

Poster Series  24" × 34"

Repetition is a Form of Change is a poster series that I made to generate a sequence out of a recursive process. Inspired by the simple prompts in Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt’s *Oblique Strategies*, the poster series takes a set of constraints and creates a feedback loop that could be repeated indefinitely: Stripes at different densities are printed out and collaged, manipulated on the scanner, and then recombined into stripes. Upon making the work, it functioned more as a record of process than a sequence.

The process began by printing different densities of stripes then collaging and scanning them.
The stripe collages were manipulated on the scanner. The manipulated stripes were then recombined into another set and scanned. The following spreads show full-scale details from each of the posters.
Connective Movements

Repetition is a Form of Change
Repeat is a Form of Change
And Eisenstein’s insights into montage also helps me recognize other moments that have greater sequential impact, such as the movement in *In Words* from the blooming cornflower to its inverted, sinister-looking root system while Moritz speaks about the Austrian far-right symbolism of the flower.
Rebecca, who sits several desks away from me, has been making a book which translates the entirety of *Rings of Saturn* into archival images. What results is a visual translation of the Sebald’s movement thought to thought, reference to reference.

She tells me I need to read the book, that it was written for me. I restart it again after having put it down several months ago and can see what she means.

Looking at a transition in the first chapter of *Rings of Saturn*, I see a tonal montage in the image of mist that ties the associations together, allowing ideas to bounce off of each other, resonate, and accumulate:

> “Perhaps, as Browne says in a later note about the great fog that shrouded large parts of England and Holland on the 27th of November 1674, it was the white mist that rises from within a body opened presently after death, and which during our lifetime, so he adds, clouds our brain when asleep and dreaming. I still recall how my own consciousness was veiled by the same sort of fog as I lay in my hospital room once more after surgery late in the evening.”

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5. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p.17

Saturn's Rings (2023) by Rebecca Wilkinson (GD MFA ’24). The spread above shows the page the quote below is taken from.
I find myself experiencing the same sensation of concepts bouncing off each other while watching Hito Steyerl's *Liquidity, Inc.* (2014). The concept of liquidity spills over into the different discourses of finance, UFC, political instability, the internet, climate change, and others—all churning together.

Notably, these collide not only in sequential montage but also in the space of the same frame.
It’s an impulse that’s familiar to me because there’s rarely only one image that I want to show you.
Whether it’s juxtaposed.
Or superimposed.
I recognize a similar tendency in the work of Sara Cwynar. Especially *Glass Life* (2021), which features an overwhelming flow of images and sound.

This combination of collage and montage is something that gets to what I feel driven to evoke in formal experiences.
In an article by Lev Manovich, he locates this tendency in the emergence of After Effects:

“After Effects’ interface put forward a new concept of a moving image: as a composition organized both in time and 2D space… When I first began using After Effects, soon after it came out, I remember feeling shocked that the software did not automatically resize the graphics I dragged into the Composition Window to make them fit the overall frame. The fundamental assumption of cinema that accompanied it throughout its whole history—that film consists of many frames, all with the same size and aspect ratio—was gone.”
After Effects has extended Eisenstein’s montage theory of sequences stacked in a temporal z-space into now having an additional z-space in every particular shot that could contain an infinite amount of layers. A potential montage of montages. A hybrid collage-montage.

In a certain sense, this isn’t exactly new given the combinations of image and text put into temporal sequence in the history of title sequences, but I don’t really see the work of Steyerl and Cwynar within that lineage and instead they point to other possibilities.
What becomes visible in light of Manovich’s insight is that After Effects initiates a new way of thinking about moving image, and what Cwynar’s work shows is that the collage-montage way of thinking persists as a way of seeing.

In *Glass Life*, despite using post-production effects and transitions, Cwynar is working mostly within the limitations of celluloid film, so the scrolling images the compose the bulk of the film are, in fact, physical images affixed to moving plexiglass plates, resulting in an approach that might be called “practical after effects.”
I find myself playing a similar game in 16mm film by trying to collage spaces together through intercutting.
Though I feel a kinship with the formal strategies of Steryl and Cwynar, I don’t feel like I’m pursuing them for the same reason. I find something closer in Laurie Anderson’s *Heart of a Dog* (2015).

In her meditation on the loss of her beloved rat terrier, Lolabelle, Anderson employs a host of effects and formal decisions that are used to communicate and articulate different states and experiences as she weaves us through Tibetan Buddhism, Post-9/11 New York, and the ability of animals to play instruments.

It’s the combination between her wandering path of thought and her interiority that speaks to me.
Seeing it in this way, my drive towards collage has to do with my feeling that every experience is really a manifold, composite experience. Aidan Koch put it very well in our conversation. She says: “It’s like most of us are all just out there having these experiences at all times where it’s like something is bringing back a memory at the same time you’re saying something to your friend and you’re walking and there’s a thing there. Somehow we are processing all these things simultaneously all the time.” 7
Part of the story is this kind of relational quality or this overlap of perspectives. So part of the idea of fragmentation or abstraction is like layering different perspectives, which is not this concrete objective reality that characters are living in. So yeah, part of that is just playing with where are people’s attention? AIDAN KOCH (AK) I have one concrete, technical question to start off with: I’m really curious when you’re making comics, whether you’re doing things page by page or whether you’re looking at it as a spread? Because as a graphic designer, I’m always thinking on the level of the spread. And I feel like your background is in illustration, right? So I’m curious if you go page by page or how that works?

AK It depends. I mean, most of the time I use this very particular paper that I end up cutting them all in half, so it is page by page and that’s a little bit practical—that size won’t fit in my scanner. But one of the things I also learned is that as much as I might have a page count laid out, I end up doing edits, I end up adding a forward. It’s a 50/50 chance that those pages are actually back-to-back. So I think usually what I end up doing is I’ll cut them into individual pages and I’ll just have them all in a row. So there’s continuities that end up bleeding through because I’m looking at more than the spread. Because I don’t know which ones will be together, I try to create harmonies that will show up at different points. And I feel like those usually go more than two pages. But I’m always aware of it being a book. And always aware there’s a bigger composition than the single page and that in order to create that fluidity of reading, there are carried-over bits or compositional mirrors. Lots of different kinds of tactics like a line...
that might carry through in different ways or have harmonious relationships.

IK Do you storyboard before or do you thumbnail sketches before going in?

AK No, that's one thing I never do or have done. And that's kind of like, I mean, partially for my own sanity. I can't know what it's really gonna look like. As much as I can sketch something out, it doesn't really help me that much. It also predetermines things versus leaving it open to chance and surprises and part of the pleasure that I find is just not knowing what it's gonna be like and those things kind of unveil themselves as I move through. But I think the stuff that's maybe a little more intentional is the sense of harmonies and rhythms. And that comes back into it when I do some editing, I'll work on like 10 or 12 pages and then I'll go back and actually read it and try and see how it moves—if it's moving too fast. A lot of times I'll find I need to add pages 'cause something is too fast of a transition. Or it's like, no, we need to kind of tone things down in this moment and then pull them back up to this next one. And yeah, so that's like, that's maybe the part where things become really intentional or finding too like if I start using a certain color palette, kind of pulling that back at different points or if there's certain symbols that kind of arise, pulling those back in and developing kind of this language for a particular project that moves you through from beginning to end. So I think every book kind of has that, where there's like certain things that just come into it and then I try and kind of keep those and move those throughout that story.

IK It seems like because you're working page by page and you're not quite sure what's coming up, it seems like it gives you a way to respond to what you just did. It's like this kind of linkage of call and response. Is that the way that it kind of works?

AK Yeah, and if you ever actually see the pages I'm working on, usually I'll be scripting it also as I go. But there might be some things that I have kind of determined but not that much. And I'm usually always one page ahead in my scripting. So there'll be these little notes that are just like scribbled at the bottom that's the next page and they'll be a little bit, and then that's going to the next page.

I'm only really one step ahead and visually I'm maybe not there yet, but I at least am kind of like figuring out—based on what's happening here—what needs to be happening next or just what that conversation is and how it moves.

IK Reviewing your work, it was really beautiful to see these resonances start to develop between different projects. The word “motif” comes to mind after spending time with your work. And I'm curious when you talk about building those harmonious relationships or distributing those things, how do you approach something like that?

AK Yeah, I think those things kind of appear pretty naturally and then kind of like I was saying, when I go back and edit or I'm kind of like moving forward, I have to read through what I've done over and over and over again, and just like try and get into the mindset of the story. It becomes very immersive. So as I do that, there'll be things that I pull from the beginning and start putting in. And I haven't done this as much, but sometimes I'll pull from the end and put something back in the beginning in and then, kind of build that relationship or those relationships throughout the story. And especially where it's like, “oooh, this actually has multiple meanings” or like, if I'm kind of seeing how there's symbols or color palettes, there are things that are kind of bridging the narrative in different ways, then those become more obvious to me too. And being like, “oooh, maybe I can play with that a little.” Or like I can kind of mess with it and bring in the intentionality even though as I'm working, it's like things are kind of just coming out. There's like that second step that is being a little more decisive and intentional. But I think, yeah, it's kind of that reading back through and seeing what's already happened and seeing what is enhancing the narrative.

IK In your work, you often have this gesture of a kind of reduction or fragmentation or removal of elements and I'm curious whether you think about that as leaving space for the reader to occupy or just how you think about it.

AK Yeah. This maybe isn't precisely what you mean but maybe you can tell me too, but something I was talking about recently was part of it usually for me is like, again, it's not necessarily about a sequence of events. Part of the story is this kind of relational quality or like even this overlap of perspectives. So part of the idea of fragmentation or abstraction is like layering different perspectives, which is not this concrete objective reality that characters are living in. So yeah, part of that is just playing with where are people's attention? Where are people's minds? Where are people's focuses? And some of that is, well, they're literally looking at this object and only this object, but they're looking at it very specifically. And it's just in those moments where it's like there's multiple things going on with our minds and our presences. So it's trying to capture that and then layer that among different characters. So that's kind of this in and out of focus quality. It's like, if you're really stressed and you're sitting there staring at something, you're both looking at it with hyper attention but you're also not looking at it at all. Like everything else is gone. There's like these different plays with just being present in a space and having our minds racing or quiet.

IK It's so exciting for me to hear you say that because I feel when I read other people talking about your work, it's usually in relation to dreams, memories, these other kinds of states of mind. But I had this sense where it's maybe this phenomenological relationship of moving through the
world. And I think it's exactly what you said—it's attention. It's the way that the world looks depending on the type of attention that's being paid to it. And so it's less about these heightened states of dream or memory but just about the very act of looking. And maybe—you can correct me if I'm wrong—it's also partly about the way that dreams and memory glom onto the way that we look at things.

AK Yeah. I think it's all happening at all times. It's like trying to capture that but also in a way that it's not overwhelming. Most of us are all just out there having these experiences at all times where something is bringing back a memory at the same time you're saying something to your friend and you're walking and there's a thing over there and somehow we are processing all these things simultaneously all the time. And seeing some of the patterns of how those things move based on what the emotional experiences are, is kind of a guiding point.

IK So I'm curious when you talk about the story, how concrete is it for you when you're thinking about this?

AK Usually there's a pretty solid outline or it'll just be a page of notes in a journal that's mostly as far as things are from the beginning. And then sometimes with some longer ones I've had more extensive details written out or there might be a conversation and that's in my head or that's ready to go where I'm like, there's maybe a scene where this happens or this interaction is happening. That's where the narrative is at. And kind of guiding principles of like, even some words about maybe the tone or certain details where it's like, “ooh, I really want this in it or this type of thing in it.” Or that's as far as that gets and it's really important and helpful. But sometimes when I'm starting, there's nothing and it's like, well, let's just draw something and see what the hell happens. And with comics, it's so fun 'cause it is relational so you really don't need much to start. You just start drawing, you're like, “Well, here's something and this—whatever I draw next—is in relation to this. So what will that be?”

IK Looking at some of your earlier work through the lens of what you're doing now—having just read Stone Blue Sky and hearing you talk about that—do you feel like this relationship to nature and the human was always there and it's just been heightened now? Or was that a really conscious decision to start to move in that direction?

AK It's definitely been there. My very first graphic novel I put out when I was like 20 was called The Whale. And that one does have those parallels in its narrative of, it's like someone grieving but then simultaneously, the story that they share is about a beached whale. There was actually a news story in the Pacific Northwest that year or the year before, it was a tropical whale that had somehow ended up in Puget Sound and being like, “oh, I was doing that then.” And I think there is maybe more intention now and seeing what's possible with exploring that relationship more explicitly. And I think seeing more in myself too, the interest in anthropology and in cultural history and lenses, historic and contemporary and who knows, future a little bit too but I think there's...
just so much there to play with and it’s so fun as themes to work with.

IK So, to me, what I really responded to when I first came into contact with your work was this relationship to inwardness or inner experience, and I’m curious how that’s maybe changing as your subject matter is changing. Have you found that your approach to storytelling or creating visual narratives has changed? Because looking through Stone Blue Sky, what I found interesting was it felt almost more filmic.

AK Yeah, this kinda came up recently talking to someone about After Nothing Comes and thinking about work now, and even re-reading something that I’d said before, which was like … I think there was this kind of … Maybe something people also identified in my work more was this connection to poetry and forms and symbols, kind of operating this way that wasn’t maybe more referential to poetry—and I’ve never been someone who’s read a lot of poetry or it’s never really enticed me hugely—but I can definitely see where that mindset was at play and how, the way things kind of danced with each other on pages was more that way. And I think now, I almost see things more as a stage play—cinematic almost—but more as a play.

IK I was curious to talk to you about your relationship to research and trying to figure out how to put this into a narrative format.

AK Yeah, I mean, it’s really delicate and challenging thinking about how to make that successful and how to not just mimic it through something that’s purely, again, non-fiction, but how to make there be space in it for playfulness and ambiguity, and keeping it kind of true to just being an artistic expression while also like, hopefully be … Having enough of that there to set off different thoughts for people. It’s hard.

IK I was wanting to talk to you a little bit about the animation work that you had been doing that I saw, and I think maybe I started going back and looking at some of the earlier stories, in terms of this body landscape relationship or continuity, it was … I think Spring is the title of the animation. Could you talk a little bit about your interest in animation, how you’ve been using it?

AK Yeah, I’m really happy that it’s back for me. I studied it for a while in undergrad and loved it, was totally obsessed in the animation lab every day for a year, just messing around, but yeah, it’s one of those things where it’s like, unless you’re going all in, it’s so, so, so consuming in time and attention, and if you’re not part of that community, it’s also hard to see … I don’t know, or find a way to get funding or step up projects in some capacity, so yeah, the stuff I’ve been sharing, the stuff I’ve been putting in shows is really, really small scale, but it’s fun that way. Things that I know I can kind of do on my own and I have a pretty good non-professional system to make them. But I love it. It’s so cool, and when I think about exhibits, it really does a lot to activate the space. It brings in time, which is so much part of graphic novels and comics, and sequence, but when you’re walking into a space and it’s static work, it’s like, well, the time is just the time the person puts into it. So I think throwing animation in there does something kind of magical, where suddenly the world is moving and activated and expressive in this whole other plane of time.

And yeah, I’ve been playing around with different ones like Spring. That piece I really love, and it’s all life drawing. So every frame was me drawing somewhere, and it has a really special connection for me because those are all places around the desert [I live near], and it’s like, “oh yeah, I sat there for an freaking hour, just drawing that stupid rock over and over.” So it has that life drawing, which I just love. And I love that it forces you to be in a place looking at something, and through that, you become connected to it.

Special thanks to Emily Bluedorn (GD MFA ’24) for lending me her archive of Aidan Koch’s earlier out-of-print work to better prepare for my interview.
Part of this composite experience is recognizing my life as being mediated through the culture I have consumed. Referencing is a compulsive behavior for me. I read things through other things.
In a conversation with Didi Schmaedecke, I described my relationship to references as: “I think part of it is just a general curiosity and constantly taking things in and then coming across an idea that seems interesting or exciting. And [the idea is] like a little go kart. You’re just like ‘what can it do?’”

I believe that is still true, but I would not only put it in instrumental terms.

There’s something that Shiraz Gallab wrote to me when I was having difficulty starting a project that I find myself thinking about often:

“Borrowing implies a reliance on another person or thing or structure to figure things out and make the next move. And that’s not only fair but it’s what we all need to do to survive, connect, find joy, and find answers.”
Usually the work follows the logic of the palimpsest—building on top of and overwriting. The particular texture of this relationship changes depending on the object or idea and the level of criticality.
For Atlas, I put my first experiences in Providence in parallel with the events of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* after noticing a parallel between the novel and the framing of the prompt (12 tasks referencing the labors of Hercules) for the publication.

I think of *Ulysses* as being a novel about mediation: the mediation of consciousness in the way interiority filters into the way the characters perceive the world, of the relation between form and content in Joyce’s formal experiments, of its self-conscious filtering of itself through other literary works.
In the case of my Wittgenstein pattern generator, it was based on having previously noticed a bit of asemic writing in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this section, Wittgenstein is examining the form of language—how letterforms give rise to language in the act of reading. I find myself wondering about the language of form—what the particular looping, sinewy characteristics of his doodles give rise to. In response, I developed a pattern generator based on his asemic forms using type design software. Creating a pattern seemed to both subvert Wittgenstein’s observation and extend it into another area.
Sometimes the revisitation generates other readings for myself, as in my usage of *The Powers of Ten* (1977) by the Eames. I had both been shown this film as a student in a 2DD class and then went on to screen for a group of students when I taught my first 2DD class. I hadn’t thought much about what the film meant, signified, or what its conditions were. In working with it, I began to see within it Google Maps, surveillance images, Silicon Valley, the limits of Cold War scientific vision and imagination where the film hits its edges in the macro and micro. And I found myself wanting to bend it into a different shape, looping it and making the movement of the film paradoxical.
I also examine origin points to see what might have been otherwise. In *The Horse in Becoming*, I used Muybridge’s *The Horse in Motion* because the filmstrip logic of linear, sequential images embedded in Muybridge’s photos from the 19th century carries down to any movie seen today.

The possibilities afforded by digital tools allows for other paths to be taken. In my case, it putting forward a labyrinthine logic by making the filmstrip logic wander by making the animation randomize iterations of a frame from a growing archive of rotoscoped drawings in which people were encouraged to draw the frame as they would draw it.
Atlas is a publication that organizes and sequences material derived from 12 tasks meant to evoke the 12 labors of Hercules. Being asked to reframe my daily life through a mythic lens, I thought of James Joyce's strategy in Ulysses, which takes a parallel approach of merging the everyday and the mythic. I organized all the content from my tasks using the hour-by-hour structure of Joyce's novel to find thematic and literal correspondences between my responses and Joyce's plot.

1. Visit Brown’s John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, explore three different areas, and share what you find.
2. Perform an intervention or change in a specified location.
3. Document four things: one that won’t exist in 1 week, 1 year, 10 years, 100 years.
4. Within 5 minutes, take as many photos as you can of a place that you would not be able to find on a standard map.
5. Choose a single public location and on a single day go there and describe your experience for ten minutes without stopping at 9am, 2pm, and 8pm.
6. Record, transcribe, and edit a fifteen minute conversation with a new classmate.
7. Superimpose one map onto another (local) map; travel there, and document your findings.
8. Have someone film you doing one physical activity and produce a sequence of stills.
9. Obtain three items for under $6 sum total from the Ocean State Job Lot.
10. With a classmate, visit one of Providence’s twenty-five neighborhoods and spend fifteen minutes (or more) documenting it.
11. Document twelve hours of weather.
12. Find at least three dates in Providence’s built environment. Investigate their significance.
Above: the publication starts out with a diagram showing the framework guiding the publication.

Opposite, top: Included is a map of my apartment in Providence keyed to Leo Bloom's residence in Dublin, and I then approximated his 8am walk as it was translated to Providence's map.

Opposite, bottom: Bloom's trip to a funeral is matched up with my own trip to Swan Point Cemetery.

Next spread: a series of classmates movements that have been rotoscoped.
3pm 12 September 2021
Providence, Rhode Island
Low-contrast haze

3pm 16 June 1904
Dublin, Ireland

Father Connolly reads a letter about Paddy Dignam’s son

Corney Kelleher is visited by a constable

A one-legged sailor begs on the streets of Dublin

The Dedalus sisters discuss their lack of money

Blazes Boylan buys fruit and flowers for his tryst with Molly Bloom

Stephen Dedalus crosses paths with his old teacher

Boyce’s secretary is at work in the office

Ned Lambert, Edenderry, and J.J. O’Mulligan visit an old schoolmaster

Tom Roche goes on his invention

Bloom shops for fruit and vegetables for Molly

Dally waits for Fagin in the hall and her father

Tom Kennan goes to a dance with a girl after Paddy Dignam’s funeral

Stephen crosses paths with his sister Dilly

and sees his family’s destitute

Simon Dedalus talks about his debt

Martin Cunningham is working on arrangements for Paddy Dignam’s family

Buck Mulligan and Haines get lunch

Farrell walks the streets of Dublin and runs into a blind man

Patrick Dignam’s mother leaves the house after the funeral

A Viceregal Carriage is met by a procession outside the city
A series of clouds travel through the publication based on 12 hours of observing the weather.

Staking a flag representing my apartment at a site dedicated to one of Providence’s original settlers.
...and she leaned back and the garters were blue to match on account of the transparent and they all saw it and they all shouted to look, look, there it was and she leaned back ever so far to see the fireworks...
Wittgenstein is a pattern-generating Drawbot script that uses a bit of asemic typography found in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as its point of departure. The project consists of a set of “letter-forms” derived from Wittgenstein’s asemic squiggles, which are drawn as a typeface in Glyphs and then automated as an output using Drawbot to generate infinite variations of this “writing.”
The character set for the typeface designed in Glyphs.

The drawbot script, which uses the typeface to generate the pattern. The GUI allows the user to set the parameters for the output. Every change randomized the character set.
The files output from the Drawbot script were then run through a pen plotter to generate the posters.
As You Zoom Out, You Zoom In is a riso animation and book that explores the Eames’ seminal *The Powers of Ten* (1977). The animation takes the Cold War-era scientific vision at work in *Powers of Ten* and twists it into a paradoxical loop where after zooming into the absolute micro level of things, you find yourself back out in the macro. The frames from the riso animation were also compiled into a book to examine the material properties of the process and recover the material aspects of animation that vanish in its final form.
As You Zoom In, You Zoom Out
The accordion book compiling the frames of the riso animation stretches to 53 3/4 in length.
The Horse in Becoming is a website that injects a labyrinthine logic into Eadweard Muybridge’s *The Horse in Motion* (1878), which operates frame-by-frame in a linear filmstrip. The drawings that make up the animation are a growing archive done by the people that surround me. Rather than running in a fixed loop, the horse will continue to mutate, grow, and change as more drawings are added to the archive and the script wanders through randomized iterations of the sequential frames.
The landing page for the site is an animation of the horse in motion running at 12FPS using the images in the archive.
Above: The site also includes an archive of the frames.

Opposite: An example of the sheets that were distributed to collect drawings for the animation.
I often need to be in dialogue with someone or something to generate work. Whether it’s an internal dialogue with the ideas and culture that I’m taking in or conversation with the people that surround me.

This desire for dialogue led to me opening up my research process into the relationship between graphic design and film. I wanted to invite others into it and take my research out of the world of private consumption. I think of Buber’s observation of the theater as a space in which a “between” might emerge, and I wonder if doing this would bring people into contact with things that would influence their own practices in unexpected ways.

In a way, the work was an outgrowth of the extracurricular Friday Night Drinks I started organizing during my first year at RISD.
The initial visual output were posters conceived as both publication material and also as a substrate on which research could reside. In retrospect, each one became a small gesture to an interpersonal context that defined each reference.
The screenings were sparsely attended and needed to be rethought. I scheduled multiple screenings in advance with some recommendations that were sourced from a form passed around to the critics in my December review. I also made another round of posters, which started to feel strange—especially with me communicating reminders for screenings primarily on our Slack Channel. The screenings were better attended this time.

The three screenings for the Winter series based on the theme of bits and pieces were *32 Short Films About Glenn Gould* (1993) by François Girard (left), *Music Videos* by Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry, and The Daniels (center, “Turn Down for What” by The Daniels), as well as *The Five Obstructions* (2003) by Lars von Trier (right).
I realized the project, for me, was simply about watching videos with other people and talking about it afterward. It didn’t matter if the visual output was a poster or some other form.

In the next iteration I invited people directly to small screenings—partly because this set of video essays were being sourced from galleries that explicitly forbade large screenings. I reached out to people based on whether I thought the work might resonate with their interests.

The three screenings for the Spring series, exploring the video essay in contemporary art, were two films by Hito Steyerl (detail of Liquidity, Inc. (2014), left), three films by Sara Cwynar (detail of Glass Life (2021), center), as well as a selection of films by Tacita Dean (detail of JG (2013), right).
The visual outputs were small, blank notebooks for the attendees to write or doodle in—to bring themselves into. They also contained an interview or essay that contextualized the artist and their work.

My favorite bit was from a lightly admonishing letter from Tacita Dean’s representation about the compromised viewing experience of her films, which contained the beautiful lines:

“In the movement of the mechanical claw and the shutter that gives the illusion of movement. Between every frame is a subliminal moment of darkness that rests the brain.”

And I think of gaps again.
Over the course of my second year, I organized a series of film screenings in fall, winter, and spring to open up my research into graphic design and film. Within this, there was the hope that conversations between myself and the attendees after the screenings would open up the films to help us see them differently and allow them to influence our own practices. The screenings took an iterative approach to film selection, scheduling, and visual output as I found out what worked best each time a series was shown.

**Film Screenings**

**Poster Series** 18” × 24”
Silkscreen 12” × 18”
Booklet Series 5 1/2” × 8 1/2”

A  
**Fall 2022 Series:**  
**Recommendations**

Sat, Nov 5  
Ways of Seeing (1972)  
*Series by John Berger and Mike Dibbs*  
Recommended by Didi Schmaedecke

Sat, Nov 12  
Man with a Movie Camera (1929)  
*Dir. by Dziga Vertov*  
Recommended by Anther Kiley

Sat, Nov 26  
Beginners (1929)  
*Dir. by Mike Mills*

B  
**Winter 2023 Series:**  
**Bits and Pieces**

Fri, Jan 20  
*Dir. by François Girard*

Thur, Jan 26  
Music Videos: The Daniels, Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry (1990s – 2010s)  
*Dir. by Lars von Trier*

C  
**Spring 2023 Series:**  
**Artists and the Video Essay**

Fri, Mar 3  
Liquidity, Inc. (2014), Factory of the Sun (2016)  
*By Hito Steyerl*

Fri, Mar 10  
Soft Film (2015), Rose Gold (2018), Glass Life (2021)  
*By Sara Cwynar*

Thur, Mar 16  
*By Tacita Dean*

Urbs (2016)  
*By Ben Rivers*
The intervention on the *Ways of Seeing* poster was based on the conversation I had with Didi Schmadecke while watching the series together.
While watching Man With a Movie Camera (1929), I took notes on all the different techniques that I noticed being used in the film.
While watching Beginners, I noticed there were actually several small video essays embedded into the film, so I decided to catalogue and transcribe them all to see if I could figure out how they worked.
The series for Wintersession was based on the theme of “bits and pieces.”
Connective Movements

Music Videos:
The Daniels, Spike Jonze,
Michel Gondry

The Perfect Man
The Five Obstructions

THUR 8PM
JAN 26

FRI 8PM
FEB 3
Hito Steyerl's booklet included her essay "In Defense of the Poor Image" along with an AI-generated sun and ocean on the back cover.
Sara Cwynar
in conversation with
Rose Bouthillier

Your films seem playful and disorienting. How do you think about the relationship between the real and the imaginary in your work? How do you balance these elements?

I have a great interest in reality, and I always try to bring it into my work. Sometimes it’s a matter of using found footage, or incorporating real-life experiences into the film. In other cases, it’s about exaggerating certain aspects of reality and using them in a way that’s not immediately recognizable. It’s about taking something familiar and making it strange or unfamiliar.

I think it’s important to keep the viewer engaged and to keep them guessing. It’s about creating a sense of tension and suspense, and making them think about what’s going on. I like to play with the viewer’s expectations and to keep them interested in what’s happening on the screen.

How do you envision your films being experienced by the audience?

I think it’s important for the viewer to be active and engaged. I want them to bring their own interpretations and perspectives to the film, and to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. It’s about creating a space for them to project their own experiences and ideas onto the film. I think it’s important for the viewer to be an active participant in the experience of watching the film.

What is the role of the viewer in your films?

The viewer is an active participant in the experience of watching the film. I think it’s important for the viewer to bring their own experiences and perspectives to the film, and to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. It’s about creating a space for them to project their own experiences and ideas onto the film. I think it’s important for the viewer to be an active participant in the experience of watching the film.

Sara Cwynar’s booklet included an edited interview from her monograph, Glass Life.
Tacita Dean’s booklet included an interview on the film JG along with a stern letter from her representation about the importance of film in the experience of viewing Dean’s work.
Those notebooks existed as small gifts for the attendees and I see that interpersonal impulse embedded in the gesture pop up elsewhere. It’s also in the small gesture of a series of screenprinted cards with Laurie Anderson’s *Five Questions to Ask Yourself When Making Art*, which were left around the studio.

It was surprisingly delightful to see them spring up in people’s working areas like spring flowers.
Laurie Anderson’s Five Questions to Ask Yourself When Making Art

Screenprint 4” × 6”

Laurie Anderson’s Five Questions ... is a small silkscreen print that was left for free in the studio. I had come across Anderson’s Five Questions after a conversation with Rebecca Wilkinson (GD MFA ’24) about how much I had loved Anderson’s film Heart of a Dog (2015). The gesture and project was small. But upon making them and leaving them out, I was surprised by how heartened I was to see these prints start to populate people’s work areas.

1. Is it complicated enough?
2. Is it simple enough?
3. Is it crazy Enough?
4. Is it beautiful enough?
5. Is it stupid enough?
Thinking about my early films again through the lens of the interpersonal, I began to see them as unwitting portraits.
As much as they are explorations of ideas, there’s also an impulse to get to know the people that surround me: what they’re like, how they think.
I decided to make a portrait in earnest of someone I hadn’t yet gotten to know as well. An earlier conversation with Kaela Kennedy about her work served as a spark: Having grown up nearby in Rhode Island, I saw her filtering her lived experience of the environment she grew up in through websites and books. I wanted to intercut these natural areas with her daily life and work.

She was excited to take me out to show me these areas she knew intimately. I didn’t want to impose a narrative on what we shot. She led me through these areas that mattered to her and the roving conversation we had in the car on the way to Beavertail that passed through her experiences growing up, the vibrance of natural materials, rock collecting, and the idea of practice in Catholicism served as a loose basis for the film.
Here and There

16mm film, silent 01:30
Featuring: Kaela Kennedy (GD MFA '24)

*Here and There* is a short film that explores Kaela Kennedy’s relationship to her work, which is influenced by the landscapes of Rhode Island that she grew up embedded within. The film was shot in Beavertail, RI, and her apartment in Fox Point with the two places intercutting with each other for a new space of overlap to emerge.
My advisor, Lucy Hitchcock, observes that despite the interpersonal aspect of my films, they’re rather solitary. I agree and enjoy that tension— that connection is not easily straightforward. That the screen works as a point of contact but a mediated one.

Two moments of the explicitly dialogic occur to me, though.

Kaela looking out at the water at Beavertail. I find myself thinking of a Caspar David Friedrich painting.
One is a collaborative project with my roommate and cohortmate Jack Tufts in which we made a tent installation that responded to the sound by lighting up—reacting to the movements and speech of any viewers.
Do You Hear That? Is an installation collaboration with Jack Tufts meant to evoke late night conversations under the stars. The installation consists of a tent, projector, and custom website that drives the interaction. The tent illuminates in response to noise, flashing brighter the louder the sound is—whether that's the footsteps or speech of the visitor, or the soundtrack of a crackling fire.
Opposite: the tent reacting to a soundtrack of a crackling fire.

Above: me laying down within the installation.
The second is a project with Didi Schmaedecke and Gabriel Drozdov where, separated from each other, they build a collaborative sentence with only the voice from the other as guidance.
The best is when nobody can tell if this is real.

Something new emerges in that space between.


I've gone through and marked my annotated bibliographies with a + for things that I found especially helpful or useful when researching this topic. It's my feeling that if you were to spend a week or two reading and watching these things right now, you will be in a much better position than I was.

For the two thesis books marked (Lake Buckley and Lynn Kiang), find them and then review their bibliographies as well. Lynn's is especially good.

One thing I've noticed in other RISD thesis books is that Soviet Montage Theory (esp. Eisenstein and Kuleshov) is a pretty evergreen reference point. I found Eisenstein helpful and applicable, but I also became interested in areas that weren't as explored.

There are a few things I would recommend looking into, but don't get too caught up in them because I think your time is best spent making a lot of things: I believe mise-en-scène is influential in considering the possibilities of animation for in Words.

I've recently started Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener and it seems like another promising entry point.

- Anderson, Laurie, director. Heart of a Dog. Arte, 2015. 1 hr, 15 min. DVD.
- Andersen, Thom, director. Get Out of the Car. 2010. 35 min. Film, n.d. A film that broke me out of thinking of just image/language relationships in film and toward a more fundamental sound/image relationship.
- Andersen, Thom, director. Los Angeles Plays Itself. 2003. 2 hr, 49 min. Film, n.d.
- Berger, John, performer. Ways of Seeing. 1972. 29 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZDE4Xf_9kA. The first episode of this series contains a sequence that does a great job of demonstrating both montage theory and the Kuleshov effect.
- Bergman, Ingmar, director. Persona. Criterion, 1966. 1 hr, 23 min. Film, n.d. I watched the opening sequence to this over and over while making In Words, at one point breaking it down shot-by-shot with Dougal Henken one night.
- Dean, Tacita, director. JG. 2013. 26 min. Digital link via gallery.
- Godard, Jean-Luc, director. 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her. Criterion, 1967. 1 hr, 27 min. DVD.
- Kwan, Daniel and Scheinert, Daniel, directors. Everything Everywhere All At Once. 2022. 2h, 19 min. Film, n.d.
- Leth, Jørgen, director. The Perfect Human. 1968. 13 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a5tT1n2MGU
- Marker, Chris, director. Sans Soleil. Criterion, 1983. 1 hr, 40 min. DVD.
- Marker, Chris, director. La Jetée. Criterion, 1962. 28 min. DVD.
- McLewee, Ross, director. Sherman’s March. 1985. 2 hr, 37 min. DVD.
- Mills, Mike, director. Beginners. Focus Features, 2011. 1 hr, 45 min. DVD.
- Steyerl, Hito, director. How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational-Mov-file-2013-51651 Screened Factory of the Sun and Liquidity, Inc. separately. Steyerl is also helpful for thinking through collage and montage.
- Tarkovsky, Andrei, director. Solaris. Criterion, 1972. 2 hr, 47 min. DVD.
- Trier, Lars von, director. The Five Obstructions. 2003. 1 hr, 43 min. DVD.
- Varda, Agnes, director. The Gleaners and I. 2000. 2 hr, 22 min. DVD.
- Vertov, Dziga, director. Man with a Movie Camera. 1922. 1 hr, 8 min. DVD.


Eisenstein, Sergei. “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form.” In Film Form and the Film Sense, 45–63. New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1957. Used while researching montage.


Sebald, W. G. The Rings of Saturn. Translated by Michael Hulse. New York, NY: New Directions, 1998. I studied the opening sections of this to trace Sebald’s movements of thought to see how he moved from one thought to another.

Stierli, Martino. “Mies Montage.” AA Files, no. 61 (2010): 64–72. An article that, in the study of Mies van der Rohe’s use of montage, parse out the difference between collage and montage in a small section.


Odell, Jenny. How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy. New York, NY: Melville House, 2021. Like Han’s text, it was influential on my thinking regarding the efficiency and instrumentality of contemporary culture.
A Note on Getting Hard-to-Find Films from Galleries

One thing I found very helpful that I only realized at the very end of my time at RISD was that you can reach out to galleries to request copies of hard-to-find video work that is often kept away from the public.

The average turnaround time of getting links to the videos was 2–4 weeks and required some emailing back and forth, but the people were amenable.

Here is the email that I sent to Tacita Dean’s representation to request digital copies of her films so I could watch them. I used this same basic form letter to get a set of links for Hito Steyerl:

Subject: Access to Tacita Dean Films for Research Purposes?

Hello there,

My name is Ian Keliher and I’m a current graduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design in the Graphic Design department. I’ve recently come across the work of Tacita Dean from an article by Hal Foster and it would be helpful for the work that I’m currently pursuing if I were to actually be able to see some of the films, but it doesn’t seem like any are available—at least online.

I’m curious if you have digital transfers of her films available for research purposes? I wouldn’t be surprised if there were no digital transfers because of how invested Dean is in film as a medium and material, but I just thought that I would check.

Thanks for any help that you can provide,
Ian

A letter from Tacita Dean’s representation that I found absolutely fascinating and (surprisingly) edifying.

The Artist has agreed to let you watch her film via Vimeo link. This is a low resolution, digital documentation of the work and not the work itself. The Artist is allowing the work to be seen in this way for exceptional educational reasons.

The work itself is either a 16mm or 35mm photochemical film that is projected in an exhibition space with a 16mm or 35mm projector. The films are often looped on film loop systems. They vary in scale, can be either front projected or back-projected depending on the exhibition space or the film in question. The screens can be attached to a wall or embedded within the wall so they are flush with it. The films can also be back-projected onto an acrylic screen that is free-hanging in the space.

Some films have soundtracks while others don’t. Silent films will always be accompanied by the sound of the projector in the room so they are never truly silent. Watching a Vimeo link will always provide a false or devalued experience of the exhibited work because without the sound of the projector, the work might appear too long and tiring.

Film is still images: 24 frames per second. It is the movement of the mechanical claw and the shutter than gives the illusion of movement. Between every frame of picture, is a subliminal moment of darkness that rests the brain. Therefore, the experience of watching a film projected is quantifiably and experientially different than watching a digital moving image. Every film frame is organically different from the next one. No two film frames are the same. They are composed of salt crystals and silver and made from a layering of several layers of emulsion on a polyester base. This gives film depth.

Film is made when a negative is exposed to light through a lens. The negative is processed and printed onto film stock. Copy negatives are made from contact printing from a positive made from the original negative and then further exhibition print copies are made from them. This is indexical to film: the light that first exposed the original negative is transferred through a continuous bond of chemistry and process to the film you are watching in an installation, sometimes decades later. This bond of light only gets broken when the film is no longer a film.

This work was filmed on photochemical film, edited on a cutting table using a blade and tape and is to be shown in a gallery or museum on an analogue projector. It will never be shown in a gallery context in any other way than as a photochemical film.

Photochemical film is different to Digital. Neither one is better than the other; they exist in parallel and both mediums have very different qualities. This choice of medium is vital for artists and for the film industry. The Artist has fought hard to keep film available for subsequent generations. It is a different medium full of beauty, poetry and light. Try and experience the work, or other works, shown properly as film installations when you can.

A special exception to show this work digitally has been granted in this educational setting. The quality will be different, it is a compromised viewing experience, and this type of showing is not as the artist intended presenting this artwork.

A letter from Tacita Dean’s representation that I found absolutely fascinating and (surprisingly) edifying.
Acknowledgments
and Gratitude

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Serena Ho
Karan Kumar
Mina Kim
Halim Lee
Sun Ho Lee

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Kevin Ju
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Shiraz Galab
Cyrus Highsmith
Judy Kim

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

By Ian Keliher, 2023

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