

Distant

by

Nadji Lindsey

Submitted to the School of Art+Design, Purchase College
State University of New York

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science in Visual Art

May 12, 2020

Sponsor: Stephen Maine
Second reader: Eric Mandelbaum

Distant

My senior project culminated in a five minute video titled “Distant.” The one element that characterizes this project and transformed it from its original idea is COVID-19. The virus had made a great influence on the project, to the point where the subject or theme of it shifted to being about COVID-19. Fortunately and unfortunately, due to the virus bringing the world to a screeching halt, it affected everyone’s everyday life. This includes my project as a whole, since my original idea was to film my actors in different locations. After setting a plan for the whole project since the beginning of senior year, I had to cancel my original idea and intent for the project altogether. But even so, I realized, the show must go on.

The inspiration to do a project using video art format came from the artist Ja’Tovia Gary with his video titled “GIVERNY I (NEGRESSE IMPERIALE)”. His video showcased nature, and a black woman being the central figure in it, mixed with stock footage of real world events. The editing is very quick and has an abundance of images overlapping the video of the woman. It's very striking and visually pleasing to look at the video that combines two different mediums and uses drawings of what appears to be leaves or flowers. Through the use of stock footage, the video conveys a message to its audience about the real world and how it reflects on us in the black community. The editing struck me, and I’d wanted to emulate that kind of format to shoot in video of my own ever since.

The original idea of this project came from the observation of how one can view the people being so attached to and wrapped up in technology. This ranges from phones, to

computers, to tablets, gaming consoles, television, and much more. Over time, we've become more detached from reality. Phones especially play a bigger part in socializing with one another, and how phones influence us is very striking. There are arguments that many mention how technology and the use of social media has connected everyone more than ever and it's been wonderful ever since. You can video chat with a friend or relative from across the world, or reconnect with someone that you haven't seen in years. Having advanced technology has its benefits to make life easier for everyone who uses it, but there are still some drawbacks to this. Before social media took over the internet, nearly everyone had the experience of the "real world" to put it loosely. Not everyone was trying to be famous on the internet doing stupid and reckless activities to get thumbs up, not everyone is trying to be relevant and push agendas, and not everyone is trying to put up an impression to make themselves look good than what they truly are. This makes people become obsessed with social media in particular, considering it has become second nature to bring up our phones whenever we're bored, unsure of what to do, in the middle of a conversation, in class and much more. People are heavily reliant on human interaction, that using video chats won't be able to replicate. Human interaction is a necessity among most people who are accustomed to it to keep us sane. Indeed we've become more connected, especially now more than ever because of the virus putting everyone in quarantine, but it also comes at price.

In the original treatment, my main character was supposed to be sort of an outlier, man who seems to be out of touch with what's going on around him. However, his reality was the old reality before technology and social media had become. He's in unfamiliar territory where no

one even notices him. They're stuck on their phones and can't get their attention away from it. The idea was to have Michael be in the old school perspective where he doesn't follow the norm as much as everyone else. However, he soon begins to realize how he feels disconnected from everyone, so he follows suit in the end. It's to show how one could easily conform to trends, particularly on the use of cellphones.

A lot of the ideas sparked from seeing people wanting to put everything on social media for whatever purpose they would have. Especially for those who tend to have cognitive dissonance on lecturing people to not do such things, yet they nevertheless do something similarly stupid and reckless. That may be calling out their hypocrisy, but this project was supposed to expose that reckless mindset people have, just because they thought it would bring attention to them since most of these people want to trend. This would occur using stock footage implemented through the use of green screen effect. Most of the tools were going to be through the video format.

The effects would include distorted overlay while using the video format to make the footage look quite old. This is to create nostalgia for those familiar with video cassette format, or better known as video home system. This would only be used under stock footage while the main character is shown in clear high definition, creating a striking contrast between the old and the new. The reason to use this format was for narrative purposes and to create intrigue among the viewers. I hoped at the time this method would bring questions to the viewers as to why would the stock footage taken from the internet be used as if it was filmed in the 90s instead of the 2010s? What would the video have gained for including this kind of effect in the first place since it's using videos from the internet?

Despite my careful planning, COVID-19 started to shut down most of everything, globally, and because of how prevalent the virus is this also required SUNY schools to remove most of the students dorming back to their homes. This also included my main actor whom I'd already started filming with in the previous semester. This caused a major hurdle for the video project since New York became an epicenter of the virus. Despite the virus forcing me to change my project overall, and causing more harm than good since my actor moved out of campus so soon, the project still needed to be resolved, at least provisionally.

The thought of having to start the project over was not feasible, because of how this virus causes a lot of people to change their everyday lifestyle including college students. The best idea at the time was to reshape the project entirely and use whatever was left of the original content that was created already. That means, whatever is already filmed so far could be used in the project, depending on how it fits in with the narrative. The narrative changed radically since now the project has shifted away from being about the detriment of technology, to the detriment of the virus, while applying similar ideas and structure.

The similar idea is placing the main character in an unknown territory again, while being haunted by visions of the news and footage of New York City. The visual effects are added into the stock footage to add questions about time. VHS tapes were a thing of the past and since the 2000s were over two decades ago, this can create a feeling of nostalgia. A weird but intriguing contrast of the old and new. The reason that date is specific to February is because of how the virus spread from China to other countries across the world. This is what the news and media coverage emphasized and it induced a bit of panic among civilians, to the point that no one doesn't know about COVID-19.

After careful consideration about using the virus to drive the narrative for the senior project, it turned out to be better than the original idea. This virus is something that probably, everyone has been affected by daily so I wanted to create something that everyone can identify with on a personal level. This can be viewed as a documentary, recording the effects of the outbreak causing social distancing and lacking populated areas.

The ending is also similar to the original idea, but without being more explicit. This time, it's implied because it creates intrigue as to why the character happens to be a part of the distorted footage, similar to the recordings of the empty streets of New York in the video. Even if the ending is up to interpretation by the viewers, the one thing that is blatant about the project is how the virus caused immense isolation among everyone in quarantine. This has the main character become lost and confused, with no one else there to communicate with him. Even cars just pass by as he tries to get their attention. Isolation and distance are the key words to really capture what this project as a whole is about, and the cause is COVID-19.

WORKS CITED

- Ja'Tovia Gary <https://www.jatovia.com/home#1>
- Giverny I (négresse Impériale) - Excerpt 1 | Tovia Gary - <https://vimeo.com/279141048>
- George Orwell 1984 - Pearson Education Publication Year 2008