



Self-Titled:

A documentation of my BFA Final Project
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{Abstract}

Self-Titled – in its many forms - is a proposal of a new way forward, a work of bleeding-edge speculative fiction that is intertwined with my identity as an artist and helps me to understand and shape my reality moving forward. It is a continued attempt to get to the root of the problems and inconsistencies of this partially broken space rather than a surface level critique of its sociopolitical state. *Self-Titled* strives to do this in an unassuming way – as a reflection on listening and personal growth, and a willingness to embrace created communities. The work I've done over the last several years fits into the framework of this much larger creative universe - each piece is meant to exist in relation to one another in order to reveal the subtleties of coexistence within an impossibly complex system that I can only begin to understand. The particular iteration of *Self-Titled* I'm presenting for my BFA final project is a three-channel audio/visual composition, approximately thirty-five minutes in length, and meant to be shown on three conjoining screens (in this case in the gallery Automata in LA's Koreatown). This paper cannot attempt to fully explore the five years of conceptual growth that led to my final project - it can only serve as a documentation of the arbitrary details and unusual associations that present themselves in the moment to be of use. In this way, it is a fitting reflection of what the universe of *Self-Titled* intends to accomplish.

{1. Dissymmetry}

The universe in which this exhibition exists was first conceived of while living in Seattle in 2015. I was working on refining the concept of a first-person, narrative-driven video game called *Dissymmetry* that focused on a group of close friends dying in a car crash at the exact same moment, only to be confronted with a bizarre and unexpected post-death landscape. In death, they gain heightened awareness and ascend to godlike status in their collective knowledge. Each world is a trial – once the friends gain a full understanding of the particular world at hand, they die and move on to the next. The moment-to-moment gameplay experience is based on puzzles, exploration, and relationship building with other characters rather than combat.

At the time I was adamant that art translated across any medium – the same thread of an idea could be spun into a clothing collection, a video game, a website, etc. I needed a conceptual framework to organize the dozens of loosely connected ideas I was collecting but doing nothing with, and *Dissymmetry* quickly expanded into the universe within which all of my work moving forward would fit into.

One of the first branches of the new universe that I began to move forward on was the concept of an hour-long, continuous musical composition that borrowed from modern pop structures but moved beyond the idea of songs and discrete movements of sound. The idea was that when the listener closed their eyes, they could see the sounds travelling through three-dimensional space, each with a physicality and form of its own. The music itself was inspired by a playlist I had curated over the previous year, consisting of what I considered perfectly crafted songs – everything from *Kid A* by Radiohead to *All Day* by Kanye West.

My intention was to design every sound with a stated purpose – if it did not serve its purpose, it was cut. Even improvisations and the intention to create from a blank slate needed to channel some purpose, and strangely became loosely associated with the album *Garden of Delete* by Oneohtrix Point Never and Season 3, Episode 8 of *Twin Peaks* (and counterintuitively, the dream logic of David Lynch in general). The idea that – for example - frenetic, highly technical jazz drumming could exist within the same composition as heavily-processed and resampled field recordings was a driving force behind the vision I could hear in my head. Although there were flashes of being able to translate these imagined sounds into reality, my time recording these initial musings in Seattle was ultimately a frustrating and unfruitful one.

{2. Shifting Outlook}

I moved away from Seattle in the summer of 2016 with the intention of applying to Cal Arts to finish my undergraduate career. I took a transformative road trip from Seattle down to Southern California to move my possessions home. Frank Ocean's albums *Blonde* and *Endless* had just been released and they were, collectively, a revelation. The idea that a personal pursuit for perfection could come to fruition in such a messy yet exciting way broke my worldview on works that I felt had achieved "perfection" like Kanye West's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Ocean's previous album *Channel Orange*, and Sufjan Steven's *Carrie and Lowell*. It made me reevaluate art as successful only if it achieved exactly the grand vision of what it had set out to accomplish. This view of perfection in design seemed now only to be a narrative perpetuated by the mythos surrounding each work. Most importantly, these albums made me see that the idea of basking in contradiction was in fact the most human, most fascinating complex that art could convey. *Dissymmetry*, then, became *Self-Titled*.

{3. First Iteration}

Now in the Fall of 2018, I began conceptualizing my BFA final project with the help of my artistic mentor, Colin Honigman. I knew I wanted it to be a diverse showcase of the numerous mediums I had worked in over the past several years in constructing this creative universe. At the time, I was deeply inspired by the extremely complex systems governing interactions between the player, the world and the AI of video games like *Red Dead Redemption II* and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Instead of continuing to evolve my universe over an extended period of time, I wanted to present six distinct works at the same time in a controlled gallery setting to highlight the ways in which they interacted to form a physical ecosystem. Each work would be accompanied by a short musical composition that would be listened to during the experience. There was to be an animated VR short film, a sculpture made of fabric and hung from the ceiling, a destructible sculpture made of concrete, a large sculptural scroll of graphic design, an interactive first person film using Microsoft Kinect and machine learning, and an audio/visual interface using both humans and the environment as inputs. Several months of work into the project, I became overwhelmed and realized that I wouldn't be able to deliver the quality or depth of meaning that was necessary for each piece to be successful, and I began to reassess.

{4. Current Iteration}

Near the end of the Fall semester, I honed in on the story and world building of the album I had been attempting to create since 2015 as the most essential part of what I was trying to communicate with my final project. I decided to take the project in the entirely opposite direction— a singularly focused, 35-minute audio/visual experience meant to be viewed collectively and on a large-scale. This decision has proved both to be a breath of fresh air and a new challenge in its own right for my cluttered, easily sidetracked mind.

Structurally, it relates to my original concept of a continuous, unbroken composition of three-dimensional sound, which lends itself perfectly to the manner in which I create. Over the past five years I've collected hours' worth of densely populated snippets of music, most of which are between one and three minutes long. Because they all come from the same conceptual core – the same universe – they make sonic and lyrical sense coexisting, although editing a 35-minute version will offer needed clarity. It's brief length and experimental structure is heavily influenced by recent albums like Earl Sweatshirt's *Some Rap Songs*, the aforementioned *Endless*, and Tierra Whack's *Whack World*.

Visually, the project will take spatial advantage of all three channels and will feature a juxtaposition of sparse image choice and lush composition. These design tenets, along with a focus on looping video, represent a concentrated push against image saturation and should allow for a more ruminative, sensory experience. In a strange way I want my audience to experience what my characters in *Dissymmetry* experienced after dying – heightened awareness and a feeling afterwards that they have gained even just a speck of new understanding of its world and our shared one.

{5. Automata}

With the assistance of Colin, initial inquiries with Automata began in the Fall of 2018, and continued back and forth dialogue resulted in an agreement on a performance date of June 27th. The show will be presented in Automata's rectangular space downstairs so that the three-channel video can mimic the optical field-of-view, with the short wall as the subject focus and the 2 perpendicular adjoining walls simulating peripheral vision. Three projectors, two speakers, and one sub-woofer will be loaned for the evening. There will be approximately four back-to-back showings so that guests can come and go as they please, as I will be simultaneously holding a reception in the upstairs area. The day before, I intend to set up the system and document the film in its entirety from the view of the space.

{6. Conclusion/The Future}

Where *Self-Titled* goes beyond the experience presented at Automata, I am not sure. I know I want to complete the album I set out to make 5 years ago beyond just this iteration – whether that looks like 12 perfectly crafted “songs” or a more fluid composition akin to what I’m presenting at Automata, I’m also not sure. I want the *Self-Titled* universe to dictate the rules from now on, and I’ll simply be absorbed into its world and let its rivers carry me where they want to go.