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ENG 281
Final Project Statement

The inception for this project began after I completed my creative response to the William Burroughs piece "The Cut-Up Method". In this work, Burroughs describes taking two physical texts and literally cutting them into segments which he mashes together to create one unified work. My creative response to this work was to attempt to modernize this method through a simple python script. In comparison to my final project, the process of mashing up the works was rudimentary, yet faithful to the Burroughs piece, simply shifting from one work to another at a flat interval of the users choosing. The simplicity of this program was slightly masked by the similarities of the source material, which were 4 rejection emails I had received from tech companies. Each email followed eerily similar beats, meaning that even when the writing shifted sources, the subject matter often barely changed.

Through this work, I began to wonder what other applications the cut-up method could have, and for that matter how automation of the splicing process could improve the clarity of the final texts. Initially I wondered if there was any way a program could detect a sentence structure (nouns, verbs, etc.) and match sentences with similar structures. Upon further inspection of the technology that could possibly analyze sentence structure, this method seemed to be overkill and barely feasible without payment to dictionary APIs, so I decided against this method. I found that a simpler, more direct approach would be to find a shared word between two sentences, and then shift from one text to another at this point of intersection. This specified approach, however, required a bank of lines that was either big enough or verbally diverse enough to cover a wide range of possible words of intersection. This meant while the base text didn't necessarily have to be small, to facilitate successful mash-ups and allow greater diversity in terms of sentences used to mash-up, the bank of lines I spliced the base text with had to be sizable.

I contemplated what resources would yield a large amount of unique and somewhat literary text. The world of music, with artists often having several albums with a plethora of lyrics in their respective discographies, seemed to the best fit to create a sufficient bank of words. Obtaining these lyrics also proved to be its own challenge, however. I was able to find an API which gave me access to access to a list of songs by any desired artist, along with a link to that song's Genius page, but nothing that could directly give me the lyrics themselves. In replacement of any official support for obtaining lyrics from Genius, I opted to use a web scraper which took song names and obtain the individual pages to rip the lyrics. This process was rather inefficient, considering it took roughly half an hour to return a couple hundred songs, but it performed the task it needed to so I decided to continue working with it.

Once I had completed the technical aspects of the work, I came to a realization: I had zero idea what to do with this program. This brought me to questions that to this day I am still attempting to fully answer: What types of texts are worth cutting up? How coherent do I attempt to make the finished products? What am I attempting to accomplish here?

Addressing the last question first, I saw the act of cutting up works and attempting to find coherency to be an inherently humorous endeavor. Regardless of how coherent or fluid the end

product is, there will always be a sense of uncanniness to the works. There could be some merit to pressing on and making a serious work either despite or in spite of this, but I found much more interest in embracing this weirdness and creating works directed towards being humorous. This direction in regards to tone helped to inform the pieces chosen to be cut-up. For a humor piece, the best course of action would be to take two types of media whose tone was in great contrast, making their mashing together all the more outlandish.

      Although as previously mentioned, the uncanniness of the cut-up would be unchangeable, the flow and coherency of the cut-up could at very least be smoothened. I did as much as I already conceivably could to smoothen the splicing on the technical end, all that could be altered to improve at this stage would be the choice of media to splice. Obviously a program that cuts sentences off for new, out of context lines would not be able to hold a direct linear narrative, so most novels were off the table. This doesn't mean that pieces that have a sense of linearity, but use more coated, metaphorical language are necessarily off the table, however. Poetry, for example, often follows a coherent narrative, but this point is less direct, and the dependency each line has on the line before it is often lesser than a work of literature. This approach to semi-focused narrative, I believe, lends poetry to being cut-up with music quite well.

      It's well enough to say that I wish to cut-up music and poetry, but considering how broad the two mediums are, this statement barely lessens the scope of the options at-hand. Considering the intent to create humor from this work through contrast of tone, however, simplifies the choice to two options: morbid poetry and pleasant music or pleasant poetry and morbid music. I decided upon the ladder because I felt that morbid music, especially contemporary music, is much more in-your-face and boastful about it's morbid subject matter, creating an interesting contrast between more formal, introspective poetry. In particular, dark gangster rap, such as the works of Chief Keef, Gucci Mane, Fredo Santana, and Lil B felt like perfect representations of this ultraviolence and aggression, so I chose songs from these artists as the database of lines to splice with. When choosing the poetry, I landed on Shakespearean sonnets because Shakespeare's status as a household name helps broaden the understanding of my work, there's a lot of content to work with, and despite the obvious tonal differences, I believe to two works cover a lot of the same, universal ground. Love, death, and heartbreak are all emotions that guide these works in their own unique ways, and I believe the collision of the two creates a work that while being funny, oddly comes from a similar spectrum of emotions.