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Reflective report

Application

I had the opportunity to try a few projects that were outside the discipline of motion graphic design.

The tangible interaction block was the most obvious example of new skills that were outside my discipline.

I had never built electronics creatively before and it was certainly fun to finally marry my own code with hardware I had assembled myself. The reason I wanted to study this block was because I have an interest in live performance visuals, quite related to motion graphic design but always a little bit more techy, whether rigging up a couple of LEDs at a small gig or setting up arrays of lasers controlled by Arduino it seems it's always good to have some prior experience working with electronic components to make projects go smoother or even just for a confidence boost.

My Projects were fairly basic but I'm looking forward to having a greater amount of time to learn Arduino and to use it in conjunction with other compatible software like Touchdesigner and Touch OSC, I think that both of these offer really interesting opportunities for lighting installations and audio visual sets especially with the addition of MIDI controllers. I think it would be great to be able to move and rotate mirrors for lasers with an Arduino controlled by Touchdesigner with an added MIDI controller. At any rate the combination of those three tools would give you an absolutely massive range of functionality no matter what project you wanted to carry out.

Another project that used some skills from outside my discipline was the Penguin Teen brief from D&AD, there was some motion graphics involved but mostly it was a brief that leaned more toward traditional digital design and also an aspect of print design. I had always had to do a lot of print design in my undergrad so it's not exactly new territory for me but it is helpful to consider the possibilities for how print and motion design can be used together in a project, for example in this one there was motion design for social media and (a fairly minuscule bit of) print design for the book covers but you could also integrate the two further by using augmented reality with the cover of a book as the trigger image. However this will have to be done in another context as it was not suitable for this project.

One more way I got to work outside my discipline was during the Borders collaborative project. One of the students I was grouped with was in the product design course and was able to laser cut a scale model of a monument we wanted to use as a projection surface. The monument was on the island of Lampedusa where our project was to be set so there was no chance of going there in person and also no good photos of the monument online.

While I didn't laser cut the model myself, it was new for me to even work with projection on a scale model. I made all the video in the project so learning how to make video suitable for this kind

of projection mapping and setting up the studio space for filming was down to me. The lighting was an interesting challenge because I had never worked in a photo studio setting where there was a light source that was constantly changing.

Skills

There are a number of new skills both within and without my specialism in motion graphic design that I've learned this year and they've changed the way I approach projects.

A slew of new techniques in After effects have streamlined my process and made it much more achievable for me to complete more technical and content heavy projects. Notably I've used a small but very handy trick of simplifying animation in After Effects through the use of null objects as parents to layers that are already animated in a different way.

Another new aspect of After Effects I've begun to explore is the option for using camera objects instead of just flatly rendering whatever content is in the viewer. I'm hoping to use this in my minor project but it may only end up being in a draft version depending on if it actually benefits the project, regardless, it'll open new doors for future projects.

There is also some experimentation I did with online tools that I found really rewarding and worthwhile, I had never used any in-browser tools or websites for generating visual assets before this but they turned out some interesting results.

During the 'Self Portrait' project for motion graphics I was able to find a royalty free library of AI generated portraits, I made a few hundred of them into an image sequence for video. This was something I would never have been able to do myself, and I definitely couldn't do it with the tools I have on my computer like Touchdesigner or any of the Adobe creative cloud suite, at least not without a huge amount of new skills and programming in Touchdesigner that would take months.

Next, during the minor project, at one point I wanted to use some ascii art, pictures that are made up entirely of different keyboard characters/glyphs and make video out of it. This particular tool simply asked you to upload video, choose the characters you wanted to make the ascii out of, and then rendered it, so there was a good amount of control over how it looked. I didn't end up using it but it can be seen in the draft videos for the Minor project as seen at the top of this webpage. Again, learning to make this myself would have been an extremely arduous process. I've actually made similar tools in Touchdesigner before but it is difficult and I was only ever able to make it work with a much smaller range of characters, and the program I made in Touchdesigner was extremely unstable/unpredictable (the project I used it in is on this website, it's called 'Echo' and is in the navigation menu top left) even though I was only using 1,0 and an empty space it always took a large number of attempts to get clips that didn't have a weird flicker or screen completely covered in one glyph.

Another skill that's a little harder to quantify is the ability to see how research can inform and improve the outcome of projects, before I had always viewed the research aspect of design projects as a roadblock rather than an asset, but gradually over the course of the year I've had to accept that it is a more valuable tool than I would wish it to be, given that for the most part I hate doing it.

General

I learnt some new skills this year and also now have more reverence for the amount of research that should go into a project to make sure it's well grounded and relates to the target audience. However I'm overall very disappointed with the work I've produced so far. The only projects I'll consider using in my professional portfolio (which can be seen on this website) are D&AD and the minor project, but both will require a lot more work before they're in a state that I would actually want to present.

      To break it down in a simpler way, there are things I've learned and benefitted from during the course of the academic year, but there are also a lot of failings that had I been able to keep up with the coursework I could have avoided.

      My minor project in some ways was quite successful but only in a technical sense really, I quite like the look of the project but the message is fairly garbled and very forced. At the beginning of the project I wanted to make a visual exploration of what a map of cyberspace might look like if you took some of the aspects of traditional cartography and blended it with new elements and animation in an attempt to describe the ever changing nature of the internet. This however ended up being a bad idea because there was no explicit message, and no target audience. My goal was initially to make something enigmatic, that was very open to interpretation but visually compelling enough to draw people in and make it stick in their mind. However this doesn't really work for a design project because you can't just say there's no target audience for your project and have no discernible message either. To address this I had to make the message about how corporations have too much control over the internet and that limits our individual autonomy when using it. I made the target audience google employees because they might have some influence over how the company behaves. Both of these concessions really turned the project into something very generic, everybody has heard the typical "blah blah blah Google is bad" argument a million times at this stage so it was very disappointing that the project ended up going that way, but I should have known that my own idea wasn't workable within the brief.

      So one of the main things I've taken from my studies this year was to not work in isolation on very specific ideas that I find interesting. When I decide to use a simple and easily interpretable solution to a brief it always ends up being a much much smoother process with a better outcome, in contrast, when I decide to attempt to convey something even a little bit more complex that I have a personal attachment it becomes a drudgerous process where no one understands the point I'm trying to make but in simplifying my idea it becomes highly generic as in my minor project. So going forward I will drastically limit the amount of personal attachment I have to the subject and any high concept projects I want to do will be purely in the realm of personal projects, while that's in some way disappointing, I'm viewing it as a positive because I know it will benefit my professional or Uni work and stress levels, while leaving me free to do whatever crazy shit I want unabated in my free time.

      A lack of organisational skills were compounded by a number of other factors for me this year.

      Working in relative isolation was a huge challenge for me because I benefit greatly from a studio environment that offers quick and easy feedback as well as the inspiration of constantly seeing other's work.

The course was obviously not ready for delivery through a purely digital method because there is no central structure for information, project briefs, grades or feedback that the tutors use. It does a massive dis-service to the high quality of tutorship that is available and personally I found it extremely difficult to find the information I needed, which turned out to be a downward spiral that was really hard to correct.