Oliver Lutz - Assignment 01

_Question #1_Short Narrative on Deep Engagement

In my studio, I wear ear plugs with a Noise Reduction Factor of 33 Decibels and headphones on top; together they effectively eliminate the mash-up soundtrack of Canal Street. On the street below, the crowds that fight over faux-bags are no longer audible. The number of fights that occur nowadays far exceed those of the last 4 years; this is mostly due to increased raids on storefronts which have prompted suppliers to distribute to new salespeople who hustle directly from garbage bags on the sidewalk. All this drops from my perception. Occasionally I hear a faint car horn as though it were far away.

My morning consists of walking the dog a couple of blocks, talking to a street vendor, having an espresso on a stoop, and walking home again. Give the dog a dried liver biscuit, change her bowl of water, send a few emails, make some telephone calls, pay a bill, I might also go out again to pick up supplies from a store that wouldn't have let the dog inside (had I gone by the store on my first walk). In the studio, ears blocked, I wrap myself with an elastic back brace – two layers of Velcro arms that hug my belly to support my back. I put on comfortable sneakers and a pair of plastic knee pads that let me kneel easily. I get up and turn around to face my work… get a quick glimpse of a painting and look away to the mess I left yesterday. I need to clean the palette before I start in.

I pick up a large razor scraper and press it into the dirty glass surface of the palette. The razor cuts through dried or wrinkled paint, nicely lifting it from the surface. When enough paint is amassed on the scraper, I smack it hard head-first against the glass in the paint-pile corner of the palette – I can just barely make-out the muffled clacking sound this makes. My dog comes over (as a result of the noise) ball-in-mouth, wagging enthusiastic and hopeful for some play. "I'm busy" I say. She wilts and walks away – beyond "sit", "come", or "down" or any piece of software I have design, this is by far the best programming I have ever done. She'll be back later. I pour thinner over the glass surface and wiped it clean.

This is all part of the routine; which is central to getting closer to that place or state of mind that I relish.

I take another look at the work – this time longer. Scooping paint from cans and jars – this is calculated now – measuring by the gob - that yellow color gets cadmium yellow lemon, cadmium red light, ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, a touch of phtalo, and a fair amount of titanium white; the middle gray will get ultramarine blue (deep), burnt umber, alizarin crimson, pthalo blue, cadmium yellow light, cadmium red light, cadmium red medium, and a lot of titanium white; the light gray with have the same but differing proportions… and so on… The paint is mixed and chopped. Made into individual piles that are then cut in half – the halved piles are made into troughs into which particular mix of oils, varnish and turps are poured like mashed potatoes and gravy. The clicking of the paint knives on glass is nearly inaudible. The brushes are loosened up with turps and I approach my work. My heart feels more active and my breathing becomes noticeably arrested.

This is where I begin to paint. Everything leading up until this point is a flirtation of sorts with my own readiness… not of a conscious sort. It reminds me of the few moments a snowboarder spends at the top of steep headwall, he slows himself and traverses the top of the shoot, to assess (or to taunt?) the mountain before dropping in. This hesitation is part of the daily routine. Sometimes, "Slide", the penguin from Fight Club comes to mind as an icon that encourages risk-taking.

In the studio, the immediate goal is clear – to get into the zone… to "drop into" a space where everything else ceases to exist; where I am in a dialogue with ideas that are larger than me. And each time that I access this place or dialogue, it is in roughly the same place where I left it… it doesn't progress until I am on board again… like a conversation that extends over months and years. In this comfortable void, everything else falls away. My peripheral vision dissolves and my depth of field narrows. When my breathing becomes smoother I know I am close. The first moment "inside" reminds me of the cinematic effect produced by a quick reverse dolly used in

tandem with a fast inward zoom... a flattening out, or zeroing in on the subject. I forget about my body; my hands, shoulder, knees... I only see the paint, knives, brushes, and the marks.

On a given day, the amount of time it takes to get into a very deep state depends entirely on how I am, on that day, and in life. If I haven't painted in 3 weeks, it may take all day painting before I actually "drop in" – and if something is bothering me I might not get in the zone at all. Sometimes I can work for several hours before I recognize that I have not been engaged – not paying attention – like driving a car on the highway. On the other hand, when I am painting regularly - on a daily basis - it comes quickly, in a matter of minutes.

I can hear the phone ringing softly, at this point the entire model inverts and I become aware of the room, city, dog, and phone. Consider now a quick forward dolly used in tandem with a fast outward zoom. I am back in the other place that I woke up in this morning – the place that consumes most of our lives. I pull off the headphones, uncork an earplug and say hello. The street noises are just as loud as the voice on the phone. It's all very brash and argumentative.

The interrupting phone call has become my measure of just how well I am doing; to what lengths will I need to go once I hang-up, block my ears again, and pick up a brush in order to return to that deep engagement. On a bad day, it might take half-an-hour to an hour to return to that comfortable void. But when things are going well, I hang-up, block my ears, pick up the brush and in a matter of seconds I am back in there.

_Question #2_Media Experiences

The following experiences occurred in a shared video game environment. It seems appropriate to point out that the environment itself was fairly influential in creating a distinct state of mind. Sound was a primary factor within the space; dominant sounds included two separate techno dance tracks playing simultaneously, sound effects from video games (guns, bombs, engines, tires, referees, ticks and clicks...) mechanical noises from pinball machines, and people shouting or laughing. Young people were stomping their feet on the dance machines (competing)... within a minute I was a bit dazed out.

"San Francisco Rush 2049" is a racing game that offers a fairly immersive experience. Once seated, the driver can adjust the seat like a real car in the same way one would in reality - by lifting a lever below the front of the seat. Stereo surround-sound comes from the dash and the extra-wide headrest. The objective of "Rush 2049" is to beat all of the other 7 drivers; opponents can be either drones or previously stored champion races. The driver can pass people, bump, get bumped, in some areas one can leave the road and take a shortcut. The game is rendered in full 3D video. The writer offers that while driving he kept the view option on camera 2, which is the default setting, because camera 1 felt too involved – too fast, and camera 3 felt too "far removed" as though he was detached from the vehicle. The steering wheel feedback encourages the driver to clench the wheel tighter. The "standard" transmission setting gets the driver much more "into" the game than the "automatic" transmission. The driver enjoys passing people and gets tense when somebody else passes him. The driver can also submit a telephone number or key so that his scored can be networked and compared with other "real" people. This network feature is a "real world" aspect of this game. After playing for a while the writer relaxed and tried to cut corners smoother and out maneuver his opponents, one hand on the wheel and one hand on the stick.

"Strikers 1945" is a standing game, the interface includes a joystick, and two "fire" buttons, which can be used alone or in combination for various purposes. The objective is to shoot as many enemy planes and ships as one can without getting hit by enemy fire. The sound comes out of the front of the machine near the screen area. The landscape scrolls downward as you fly above it. The video itself is flat, with minimal use of perspective. Despite the dated quality of the design, the game achieved total chaos. The amount of enemy fire is stifling, and as a result one has to crank the joystick around rapidly so as not to get hit. The writer ended up resorting to a lot of the total-destruction option which he quickly learned the button-pattern for. The tenseness with which the writer cracked the joystick resulted in aggravating his tendonitis. Players definitely get involved in this game – it isn't the believability - so much as it is the premise of the game, and the urgency one feels... it is about survival. (Continued on next page...)

"San Francisco Rush 2049" – offers a great design with feedback elements which far surpass that of "Strikers 1945". The overall impression however is that the premises for these games are entirely different: a racing game (to outmaneuver one's competition) vs. a battle game (to stay alive while you kill everyone else). Despite the writer's preference for the racing game (he actually enjoyed it) he concedes that surviving in battle was a far more engaging game experience (even if he didn't enjoy it).

_Question #3_List of Attributes

Development
Awareness
Controllability
Focus
Meaningfulness
Interest
Goal or objective
Challenge
Risk-taking
Environment