

University of Guelph

Essay 1

What Does It Mean to Be Experimental?

Jay Jasztrab

Experimental III

Megan Arnold

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In my third experimental class at the University of Guelph, I have not truly reflected on what it means to create “experimental” media (until now, anyway). This is particularly odd, given that I have been creating experimental media for over a year now, under the direction of instructors and drawing on my lived experiences. If I had to put words to it, I’d say that, for me, what makes media experimental is the concept, where it’s drawn from, and adaptability when making art. I find my experimental ideas come from bits and pieces of my own chaotic flow of consciousness. These thoughts are then translated into a media format (video, audio, performance, multiples, etc.), and that’s where I begin creating experimental art/media.

I find that my approach to creating experimental media has many drawbacks, as I feel obliged to filter my flow of consciousness to make my art seem more coherent rather than a regurgitation of half-finished thoughts. I find that I stifle my own ability to experiment with a self-imposed filter that makes me think my art needs to be perfect. However, if you asked me to define what “perfect” means in this context, I wouldn’t be able to tell you. Lately, my experimental practices have been influenced by our TV show assignment. Considering this, I have been experimenting with the concept of “self-insertion” and what it means to create a character that is not only a blank slate but also so full of lived experience as to be relatable. I’m finding myself in a situation where I must be adaptable to my group’s needs, but also to my own desire to be experimental as an individual, and I think in ways that could be experimental. Meta.

While reflecting, I have realized that media becomes “experimental” not solely through “unconventional content” but through the ways it disrupts and bends expectations of production,

form, distribution, and spectatorship. Experimentation can occur in processes using low-budget tools and live feeds, and you can also take advantage of glitches or think conceptually by questioning who controls media and how it circulates. BUMP TV is a 24/7 TV channel broadcasting from the basement of a Victorian house and allowing anyone to host their own show. BUMP TV reframes experimentation as radical accessibility and decentralization. Rather than polished, institutionally sanctioned programming, BUMP embraces immediacy, unpredictability, and community participation. In my opinion, the experimental quality lies in collapsing boundaries between artist, audience, and broadcaster, and in treating transmission itself as material. In this course and Experimental II, I have been experimenting both conceptually and materially with video aspects, but not in a live setting. I believe that, given my nonlinear thought processes, live-streamed experimental art would not be well-received by my audience. I believe that to create live experimental art well, ideas need to be refined quickly, and grave technical errors should be troubleshooted on the spot; for better or for worse, this is not my process.

Based on my reflections throughout this essay, Sledd, also known as Evan Gordon, strikes me as an experimental artist, as evidenced by his artist talk, an episode of Planet Sledd, and his music, which I began to explore on my own in Experimental II. While his current work is primarily music creation, Evan had three seasons of live-streamed multi-media television on YouTube called “Planet Sledd”. These live streams served as a way for Evan to make art during the pandemic and find a way to thrive in his particularly cold living situation. While semi-scripted and containing pre-made, campy elements, Evan’s livestreams were entirely controlled on the spot. While Planet Sledd originally served as a way for Evan to connect with an audience,

he began to create a character arc and plotline that each livestream would loosely follow. In class we watched Sledd TV. What stuck out to me in this episode was the satirical, slight mockery of most mainstream television from the 2020 era. What stuck out to me even more is that in his cooking bit, he made candy cane cotton candy, and his luma keying would not cooperate with him, but instead of halting the stream, he rolled with it. This ties into what I said at the start about experimental art being adaptable. I would imagine it's easier to create experimental art/media when you roll with the punches and potential hiccups than trying to combat them. As someone who watches/listens to a lot of Evan's work and music on my own time, my view of what an experimental artist is has been heavily shaped by him. I strive to be in a position one day where my practice can be self-directed but also go with the ebb and flow of where life, technology, and other mediums take me.

In reflecting on my own practice, I've come to understand that experimentation is less about aesthetic chaos and more about a willingness to risk instability. My struggle with perfectionism reveals a tension between control and surrender. I want my work to feel intentional, yet the very act of over-filtering contradicts the spirit of experimentation. What I admire in projects like BUMP TV and in Planet Sledd is not simply their unique formats, but their openness to unpredictability. They treat mistakes, glitches, and limitations as part of the process and the final project rather than catastrophic. To me, that mindset reframes experimentation as responsiveness to technology, to the audience, to circumstances, and to the self.

Moving forward, I think my challenges are to become less of a perfectionist and not to abandon refinement, but to reconsider what refinement means. Perhaps it is not about polishing away every rough edge, but about sharpening my ability to adapt in real time. Whether I work in live formats or pre-recorded media, I can still embrace uncertainty as material. If experimentation is about bending expectations and disrupting norms, then it must also involve disrupting my own internal rules. Ultimately, after some much-needed reflection for this essay, becoming an experimental artist may mean learning to trust my nonlinear thinking rather than correcting it, allowing process, imperfection, and evolution to coexist with intention.