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On Experimental Practices in Art

Experimental Studio terrified me when I first added it to my timetable in November of 2023. On program-specific campus tours no one could ever properly explain what kind of art was made in that class, the course description was vague enough to leave me completely confused, and my previous experiences with media arts focused classes were so broad that I never grasped what it meant to be a media artist. I fell in love with Experimental Studio; it became the highlight of my semester, and I knew I wanted to take all three levels offered. In the second level, I got to let my freak flag fly in a way I hadn't allowed myself to since I was a kid, producing a variety of works that I still feel proud of. But now I've gotten to level III, and still when my family asks what Experimental Studio means as an art subject, I can never give a straight answer. What *does* experimental mean, and what does it mean to be an experimental artist?

Understanding what makes media experimental seems like a simple task – the answer is in the word “experimental”: it is work that experiments with different ideas or modes of art-making. But I would argue it's something deeper than that. Take, for instance, Channel 4's *The Divine David Presents*, which is experimental for its disruption of a typical television framework. It uses unusual editing choices, colours, and unfiltered viewer submitted video-artworks. Beyond these stylistic experiments though, there is a sense of conceptual boundary-pushing that separates this series from regular television. Divine David is an overtly queer character, he is the one in charge, and his vision for TV is a reflection of this queerness.

The show balances comedy and abject, subverting audience expectations and leaving viewers feeling uncomfortable and/or intrigued. There's a laissez faire attitude with regards to genre, style, and tone, a choice to not adhere to one subject or movement. It's the rejection of the comfort and expectations of mainstream television that makes *The Divine David Presents* experimental.

Perhaps the experimental aspect of media art lies in the use of modern technology as a vehicle for art-making. In Steven Loft's essay, *Aboriginal Media Art and the Postmodern Conundrum: A Coyote Perspective*, he remarks that "New media art, and web-based practices reside in an incredibly accessible and accessed realm" (Loft, 94). Media arts and technology have become even more accessible now than they were when Loft's essay was published over 20 years ago, allowing anyone to partake in art-making without the monetary or logistical constraints of other art mediums. This accessibility allows artists to make works that are niche, weird, and unfiltered without fear of losing money or wasting materials, giving them the freedom to push the envelope with what it means to make art. During SLEDD's artist talk, this is an experience that he echoed. He was able to create a television inspired live show using accessible materials like YouTube Live, Photoshop, and PNGs of Halloween costumes (Gordon). It gave him the ability to experiment with his artistic practice and make a work, Planet SLEDD, that challenged standard media practices. With modern technology, art is democratized, as is the case described in Chris Hampton's article, *BUMP TV broadcasts 24/7 from the basement of an old Victorian — and anyone can have their own show*. By having access to technology to create media art, the artists at BUMP TV got to make and broadcast a show that pushed outside of the boxes of traditional television, including voices that may not have been heard, and concepts that might not have been approached otherwise (Hampton). *That* is experimental.

This method of experimenting is something I find liberation in with my art. There's a freedom found in the media arts that is missing or harder to reach with other mediums, and it's influenced my work from the moment I took Experimental Studio I in 2024. Broadly, I take more risks in the art I make, accepting imperfection and pushing the mediums I use, even when they're more traditional. I'm tackling art through a combination of silly and serious, something I discovered a love for in Experimental II's Live Art and Video Art assignments, and thinking about community and the sharing of experiences, which is something I found so compelling about experimental media broadcasts. Learning about the ways in which I can share my art beyond traditional institutions was truly inspiring. In this class specifically, I'm experimenting through mediums and tools, using a mixture of analogue and digital equipment to film our TV Pilot episode. I'm also incorporating elements of improv and the aforementioned acceptance of imperfection and chance. But what I'm really excited about is my intention to make experimental music/sound art to score the episode, which will express a love for music that has never gotten to shine in my art the way it will in this instance. I'm getting the chance to do things I've always wanted to do, yet never had the opportunity to – and really, isn't that what experimental is all about?

Media is experimental when it pushes beyond conventions, whether they be the conventions an artist is used to working within, or a more broad societal, cultural, or art historical convention. This is why media art and modern technology are so important to Experimental Studio; their newness and ease of access means that there is still testing and exploring to be done, an artistic legacy to build on those mediums. "Experimental" might look different depending on the artist, with some experimenting in concept (like *The Divine David Presents*), execution (like *Planet SLEDD*), or some magical combination of both. It is an

all-encompassing descriptor of art, it is the expression of freedom within a medium, and it is what pushes art forward. When my family asks what it is that I do in Experimental Studio, I can let them know that I'm making art that defies convention, tests limits, and gives me the freedom to express every aspect of myself.

Works Cited

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