HALLWAY

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Abstract

HALLWAY is a 12-minute 360° video that is an investigation into the filmmaker's anxiety through episodic depictions of childhood trauma. It draws upon semi-autobiographical elements surrounding childhood trauma and neglect, and the collateral anxieties manifested in adulthood. With the use of life-sized child mannequins, 12-inch action figures, and a computer-generated virtual background, this project explores early childhood experiences of "proximate separation" that occur when attuned contact between parent and child is lacking or interrupted. (Maté, *When the body says no: the cost of hidden stress*, 2003). The first episode is that of Donald Trump's childhood, in which he witnesses his father bullying his older brother. The second episode renders a scene of the filmmaker's mother as a child, encountering a Russian soldier during the Second World War. The third episode recalls the filmmaker's own childhood and how his mother threw him out of the apartment into the hallway.

By depicting scenes of childhood trauma, this project's intent is to signify possibilities of "liberation" from such pain by rendering a viewing experience that endeavours to provide greater insight into trauma and the human condition.

Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, and to everyone suffering from anxiety.

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Introduction

It was shortly after what I had entitled my "awakening" that I applied to the MFA program at York University with a proposal for a thesis. I was enthusiastic about exploring my awakening and wanted to bring that to film in some manner.

Prior to my awakening, I was in a terrible state of mental health as I was suddenly thrust into the position of caregiver to my physically ailing elderly mother, and I had many misgivings about what I was doing with my life.

I was looking for relief from my depression, reading any material on the subject. I came across Johann Hari's book Lost Connections (Hari, 2018). I was intrigued to find out that depression and anxiety are often comorbid. Many of the stories within examine how adverse childhood experiences are a major cause of depression and anxiety.

This research led me to the work of Canadian physician Gabor Maté which had me looking to read any interviews with him. In one instance he said, "A crying baby is an anxious baby." This made me recall the trauma I experienced at the age of two, when my mother threw me out of the apartment into the hallway. Years later, when I asked her why she had done that, her response was that I would not stop crying. I asked if she had tried to pick me up or feed me, to which she replied: there was nothing she could do to stop me from crying.

My awakening occurred around the anniversary of my father's passing. I typically post a photo of him on social media; I have often used the photo pictured below. Upon examining it, I noticed that the license plate reads 1972—which meant that I was around 18 months old. What struck me about the photo this time was that I do not appear to be crying; nor do I look distressed or anxious. This photo was taken when we were living in Barrie.

Image 1: My father and me in Barrie, Ontario

To be sure about this, I asked my mother if I cried much in Barrie; her response was that I did not. So, in a few months time, I went from a happy little toddler in Barrie to an anxious, crying two-year-old in Toronto. What had changed? To investigate this further, I asked my mother when it was that she started working full-time. She began her job as a keypunch operator when we moved to Toronto. Her shift started at 4pm and ended at midnight, which meant she had to leave me every day at 3pm and I would not see her again until I woke up the next day.

Upon realizing this, a sudden shift happened within my psyche. I suddenly broke through my depression. A good amount of my anxiety was suddenly gone. I was not even aware of my anxiety until it had disappeared, its existence made apparent to me by its absence. The realization that I had suffered the daily ritual of feeling abandoned when my mother went off to work somehow liberated me from what I concluded to be lifelong anxieties. Unable to verbally articulate my displeasure in her leaving me in the charge of a stranger every day, resulted in my incessant

crying. This in turn resulted in my mother losing her temper and throwing me out of the apartment. Although these events happened when I was two years of age, the shock of the door slamming in my face resulted in an indelible flashbulb memory of being in the hallway. However, I have no recollection of the events leading up to why I was thrown out. It was the reconnecting to the frustration of her leaving every day that lifted from me the fog of anxiety. The feeling of liberation was so exhilarating I felt it needed to be shared.

From then on, I have developed an "anxiety radar", looking for it in everyone. I see it in the former president of the United States—a man who has given so many people anxiety. I see it in my mother—the person who inadvertently gave me my anxiety. And I still see it within myself. Through this experience, I felt I had found a path toward liberation from depression and anxiety, and I needed to share it. I knew that I had to explore this as a theme for a film project.

Chapter One: Childhood Trauma

Background and Reasoning

Canadian physician Gabor Maté posits that the first four years of childhood are critical to the formation of the ego and an individual's mental health. In his book, <u>When the Body Says No</u> (2003), he writes that, given the difficulties of the modern world, parents are often too busy and distracted to provide the proper nurturing and attunement required for the mental well-being of their children.

> For the satisfaction of attachment needs in human beings, more than physical proximity and touching is required. Equally essential is a nourishing emotional connection, in particular the quality of attunement. Attunement, a process in which the parent is "tuned in" to the child's emotional needs, is a subtle process. It is deeply instinctive but easily subverted when the parent is stressed or distracted emotionally, financially or for any other reason. (Maté, *When the body says no: the cost of hidden stress, 2003*)

This lack of attunement is a topic of exploration throughout this film project. In episode 1, we hear that the boys in the Trump family had very little interaction with their mother and had to be parented by an unloving father. In episode 2, my mother had no one to protect her during a traumatic encounter with a Russian soldier. In the final episode, my own lack of parental attunement was a result of her taking on a job outside the house.

In all three cases, there is a disconnect between mother and child. There is little argument as to how deleterious an effect such a disconnect can have on a child's development. From Allan Schore, <u>Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology</u> (1994):

> If there is some delay in maternal regulation due to the mother's refusal to enter into a dyadic affect transaction, stress escalates beyond the child's coping capacity (self-regulation) and appeal becomes transformed into hyperexcitatory protest. (Schore, 1994)

My own protests have never left me. At the age of two, these protests took the form of tears, which eventually turned into fits of anger and irritability as I grew. To this day, I am easily agitated when I feel ignored. Maté has noted in his writings that children of depressed parents are prone to such irritability (Maté, Scattered minds: a new look at the origins and healing of attention deficit disorder, 1999). I eventually recognized my own rage as a form of anxiety. Ultimately, I felt I was an abandoned child, and would meet those emotions with anger, feeling betrayed by my mother whose love I felt to be a right.

This is not meant to be an indictment of how my mother raised me. I have come to understand that my primary caregiver, a depressed immigrant Korean woman, was too stressed and burdened with holding down a full-time job to give me the necessary attunement contact I required. And although she was physically present, and loved me as best as she could, she was suffering from her own mental health issues and likely dealing with depression. But from my perspective, I felt there was a void in my "perception of being seen, understood, empathized with and 'got' on the emotional level." (Maté, 2003) This phenomenon has been called "proximate separation".

Affluence doesn't protect a developing child from proximate separation. The world has witnessed the rageful rants of the 45th president of the United States. How unfortunate for the young Donald Trump that his mother was physically unable to nurture him into the world. And the chauvinist upbringing that put all the male siblings under the parentage of an unloving father must have added further damage onto Donald's psyche. I make the supposition that his incessant look-at-me-ism, as evidenced by his constant tweeting, is a result of feeling never truly 'got' by his primary caregivers. He only garnered his father's attention by acting brash and by bullying his siblings.

Mary L. Trump writes of her uncle:

> In order to understand what brought Donald—and all of us—to this point, we need to start with my grandfather and his own need for recognition, a need that propelled him to encourage Donald's reckless hyperbole and unearned confidence that hid Donald's pathological weaknesses and insecurities. (Trump, 2020)

The full title of Mary L. Trump's book is "Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man." At the time of his election, I was living in the Republic of Korea, and Donald Trump's chest puffing rhetoric towards North Korea had given me anxiety. Just how dangerous was this man? I had a nightmare where nuclear bombs had dropped on the peninsula. When COVID-19 struck, putting the whole world on pause, the subsequent scapegoating of Asians had heavily triggered my anxieties. Donald Trump and his racist rhetoric had been a huge source of anxiety for me since he won the presidency. I associate him with fire, which is the reason the scene ends with everything in flames. His inclusion as part of this project is in some way a means for me to reconcile with that anxiety.

The same is true for the second chapter that details my mother's childhood trauma. Both Trump and my mother, I realize, are sources of anxiety for me. One reason I have attempted to recreate their respective traumas is to potentially relieve them of their anxieties, perhaps just as that same introspection had briefly cured me of my mine. As unlikely as it is for Trump to see this film, it is a document that I have created and put out into the world. As of this writing, my mother has yet to see this project, and I am still apprehensive about showing it to her.

The film also investigates the pathology of my mother's ailments. As stated in the film, her physical condition has profoundly affected the trajectory of my life. I would not be working towards an MFA had I not returned to Canada to take care of her. Nor would I have experienced

my awakening had I not been forced to confront my own mental health issues. All these elements

are tied together.

The main thesis of <u>When the Body Says No</u> is the correlation between stress and disease. In

it, Gabor Maté writes:

> Cortisol also has powerful bone-thinning actions. Depressed people secrete
> high levels of cortisol, which is why stressed and depressed postmenopausal
> women are more likely to develop osteoporosis and hip fractures.

Image 2: My mother's L2 vertebrae fracture

Because of my mother's reluctance to address her childhood traumas, I see her traumatic

episode as something frozen in her memories, locked away in a prison of ice. This inability of

hers to access that trauma results in her autoimmune system slowly eating away at her body. This

is the reason I finish that chapter by encasing the scenery in ice.

Note that in the film, I display the words "cortisol" and "adrenaline" in the form of floating text as part of the mise-en-scène. Along with the aesthetic considerations for layering in text to emphasize various ideas within the narrative, I purposefully had them fly around in this manner to also administer a subtle form of EMDR. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is a psychotherapy technique used to help treat people with post-traumatic stress disorder. The treatment involves moving the eyes rapidly from left to right while they are thinking about traumatic events. This somehow "softens" the memory, making the associated emotions less impactful for the patient. Within this film project, as the viewer watches the text float around, their eyes are motivated to move to follow the text. Because the whole film is a 360° video, the viewer will be inclined to shift their gaze to catch all the visual happenings, and in the process of watching will be administering to themselves a form of EMDR.

One goal of this project is to activate a possible liberation for the viewer from their own childhood traumas. By detailing and going through the example of my own awakening, it is my hope that an audience will walk away from the viewing experience more willing to reflect upon their own anxieties and childhood traumas. Film is often used as an escapist form of entertainment. This makes me wonder: escape from what? It is my contention that everybody is suffering from some form of mental distress. This project endeavours to address that distress.

Chapter Two: 360° Video

The Medium is the Message

In March of 2020, I was taking a Future Cinema course, and was tasked with making a project. I chose to shoot a 360° video. I fell in love with the medium because of its novelty. No longer was there a frame for the image to be confined within. The title for that piece is *Zoetrope*.

Image 3: Still from 'Zoetrope' (2020).

I tried to gain a complete understanding of 360° video as a medium. The title "Zoetrope" refers to a pre-film animation device that produces "the illusion of motion by displaying a sequence of drawings or photographs showing progressive phases of that motion" (Zoetrope, 2020). I chose this title because a zoetrope device is circular in shape—analogous to the viewing experience of a 360° video, as the audience is put inside a virtual sphere.

Image 4: Still from 'L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat' (1895).

Take note of the words "pre-film" when describing a zoetrope device. The medium of 360° videos is still quite nascent. Recall the Lumière brothers' film *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1895)* as an example of the film medium in its early stages being used to document everyday events. We see the same kind of usage with 360° video, albeit the events tend to be more spectacular, allowing viewers to swim with sharks or fly through the cosmos.

Marshall McLuhan may be intrigued to see how creators are struggling to understand what exactly this new medium is. McLuhan posits that each new form of media shapes messages differently thereby requiring the users to modify how they engage in the experience of viewing and listening to those messages. In his seminal book <u>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</u> (1964), McLuhan describes the concept of hot and cold media. Film is categorized as a hot medium, since the participant situated in a dark movie theater needs only to utilize one primary sense—the visual—presented with enough fidelity such that they can relax the rest of their senses and be totally enrapt. (Marshall McLuhan, 2020)

Based on this argument, 360° videos are a cool medium that require increased participation from the user because they must register a larger frameless image that is coming at them from all sides. At the time of his writing, McLuhan claimed television as an example of a cool medium, since the user had to fill in the blanks of the low fidelity, black and white images being broadcast over the air.

Katy Newton and Karin Soukup's VR/AR media experiments yield some interesting conclusions in their article "The Storyteller's Guide to the Virtual Reality Audience" (2016):

> Because it is impossible for humans to see in 360°, they must actively choose what to look at and when. Looking gives the audience agency, not to change or affect the story in VR, but to choose which pieces of the story they take in, make meaning out of and combine with other information to form a story in their minds. In this way, no two individuals experience the exact same story, because no two individuals look at the exact same things in the exact same order.

Newton and Soukup go on to say, "Perhaps there was too much information in 360° for the audience to process. When telling a story in 360°, we need to consider how to combine audio and visual elements without overloading the audience."

They conducted tests that gave participants different fields of view ranging from 360° to 90°. With a full 360° field of vision over the smaller angles, participants had trouble remembering the fine grain details of what they were experiencing. There appears to be an inverse relationship between stimulation and involvement. The task then for 360° creators is to find a sweet spot with their message such that it achieves the appropriate level of involvement for the user who is otherwise being over-stimulated. It remains to be seen if *Hallway* has found that sweet spot and does not overload the viewer.

Currently, creators are attempting to tell stories in 360° by utilizing hot medium properties borrowed from film. Storytelling doesn't seem to work in the same fashion in 360°. Editing and

cinematography cannot be utilized in the same manner. Creators should look to take advantage of 360° video's cool medium attributes by better understanding them.

Currently, 360° videos on mobile devices require too much participation by swiping and searching for the event, making it akin to peeping through a keyhole. Most viewers will experience *Hallway* on a computer monitor, using a mouse to click around the 360° environment. Knowing that the viewer would be engaged in a 'search for the event', I tried to guide them with the audio. This was done principally with the voiceover, but sound effects such as footsteps were also utilized to help keep the viewer informed as to what was going on offscreen.

Equirectangular

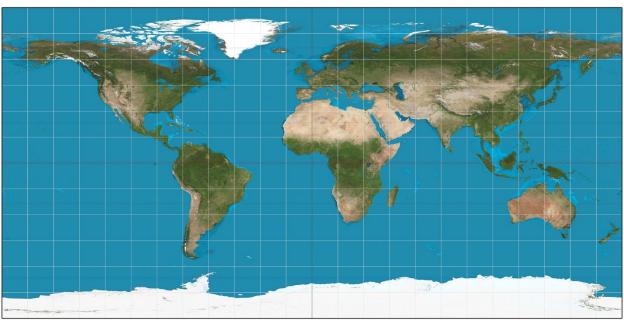*Image 5: Equirectangular projection of the world; the standard parallel is the equator (plate carrée projection) (accessed: 2021).*

Image 5 pictured above is an equirectangular still image of the earth (Equirectangular projection, 2020). Like the still from *Zoetrope* above, this is the standard form a 360° image must take for it to be mapped on the inside of a virtual spherical screen. Translating a spherical image into a flat

rectangle is a problem that has plagued global cartographers for centuries (Gott, 2021). Equirectangular images are now the standard for uploading spherical content to the internet, with webpages requiring a 360° video player that converts them back into spherical images.

Uploading a 360° video to either Vimeo or YouTube has its shortcomings. These are currently the largest user-created-content platforms, and each of them have its own respective means of displaying 360° videos. Both platforms allow the user to view a 360° video on their phone, where the accelerometers give the viewer the ability to re-position their phone to see any angle they choose. One difference between the two platforms is the ability to zoom in or out of the image, which Vimeo does not allow for, which is why I chose YouTube to be my main platform for dissemination.

Where does it fit?

Since it is a 360° video, *Hallway* cannot fully place itself within the canon of regular cinema, and that brings up the question of where it should be located. Because 360° video as a medium is still in flux and has yet to find a footing among the public, *Hallway* needs to be placed within the broader framework of all moving images. Is it even possible to name a famous 360° video?

In terms of genre, *Hallway* could be categorized as an experimental documentary. But such taxonomy only makes sense for regular cinema. The original aim for the dissemination of *Hallway* was to make it scalable for gallery spaces as a multichannel installation or as a fully compiled singular piece for festivals or broadcast. Aesthetically, *Hallway* was inspired by the surreal, dreamworld video installations of Bill Viola and artist Michael Snow. The tableau-style work of Roy Anderson also played a large part of the conceptualizing of this piece. The initial

hope was to possibly create a three-channel installation in a gallery space with each "episode" projected on the three walls of a square room. But as the project has evolved, this piece has morphed into what might be considered a virtual installation, where the viewer can experience the "story" through the exploration of different environments.

What is art if not about discovery? *Hallway* is about the act of "finding". Not only as a 360° video, where the viewer is tasked to engage in the act of finding the narrative, but also to discover better understanding of anxiety, and perhaps our own mental health.

Chapter Three: Previous Work

Structure, Rhythm and Music

Hallway employs a structure that is composed of three discrete sections: Fire, Ice, and Water. The only live-action segment of the piece is a shot taken from a forest and is utilized to break up the acts. By going from 'forest' to 'room', this visual transition forms a contrapuntal or counterpoint rhythm.   Within music theory, a counterpoint rhythm takes two different musical lines and marries them together to form a new harmonically related piece.

I can only surmise that my penchant to gravitate toward these structural rhythms is due to the fact I have a degree in mechanical engineering. I see a kind of balance in employing such structures.

Image 6: Still from 'Canon' (1964).

The previously mentioned 360° video *Zoetrope* also borrows from musical theory. *Zoetrope* was heavily inspired by the 1964 Norman McLaren and Grant Munro short, animated film titled *Canon*. In it, the filmmakers' intent was to illustrate a specific music compositional technique called a "canon". Some simple examples of a canon (also known as a round) are "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Frère Jacques". The song follows the leader melody repeated over and over again, with each successive round sometimes adding new harmonics by changing the octave and joining in unison. The result is a sum of voices that build on top of each other to create a new musical space. *Canon*'s composer Eldon Rathburn details the philosophy behind this: 'When we listen to a canon we are confronted with many voices. Our attention can shift from one voice to another, and the focus of our listening will probably be different with each performance.' (Rathburn)

Zoetrope emulates *Canon* by having the performer interact with a different iteration of themselves. As a viewer watches the scene, we pick and choose which character to follow with our eyes. There are seemingly no cuts in the scene as the audience does its own editing. With each viewing our focus will 'probably be different with each performance'. The "editing" isn't done in series, but more in parallel.

Image 7: Still of the 90 second shot from '5 x 90: the wake' (2005).

Pictured above is a still frame taken from my 2005 experimental narrative short film *5 x 90: the wake*. Each character was shot separately and later composited together in a seamless static tableau. The shot is a ninety-second-long scene about a wake. We hear one conversation proceed all the way to the end of the ninety seconds and then there is a short interlude, and we return to the same exact image, but with the audio of a different conversation. This is done a total of five times. Thus, the title, *5 x 90*.

Image 8: Still of the interlude from '5 x 90: the wake' (2005).

During the short interlude, we see a balloon floating in a blue space, accompanied with orchestral music. Like *Hallway*, we go from 'room' to 'balloon' and back again, with each interlude accompanied by music.

The music chosen for *Hallway* is the aria from the Goldberg Variations by Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach's compositions often employ the use of counterpoint where, for example, if playing on the piano, the left hand, rather than playing a set of supportive chords for the melody of the right hand, has its own independent melody working in conjunction with the right in

harmonious fashion. The 'forest' scene has its own tone, meant as a calming breath relative to the more menacing traumatic tone exhibited within the episodes of each 'room'.

Buddhist philosophies often sneak into my work. In the bottom left-hand corner of *5 x 90: the wake,* you can see the statue of the Buddha on the table. In the circular window is the head of a Buddhist monk walking behind the scene. The structure of *Hallway* is almost meant to be meditative. The contrast between the 'forest' scenes and the 'rooms' is deliberate. Bouncing back and forth from 'forest' to 'room' is analogous to how a meditating mind finds itself caught in a thought or emotion, and eventually brings itself back to a place of calm.

Chapter Four: Making the Film

COVID-19

Understandably, COVID-19 delayed the progress of this project. I contemplated on how to make adjustments to the piece so as to avoid putting people at risk. I had hoped to build a large set at the York Cinespace studio, but that was shut down due to COVID-19 restrictions. All these events forced my hand in finding an alternative means of finishing this production. Ultimately, I decided to use dolls and mannequins in the place of actors and use virtual backgrounds created in the Unreal Engine.

The decision to use dolls and mannequins proved to be practical as I was no longer tasked with finding actors. I was initially trepidatious about casting and filming the 'child' characters. The original concept of the project was conceived as a complicated tableau seen from the perspective of a child. Because the characters were two and three years of age, I was not sure if I wanted to actually cast child actors to accomplish this idea. I contemplated the idea of telling the story entirely from the POV of the child with the camera acting as their eyes. But would the audience know that they were being put in the position of a child character? Did we need to see the children?

By 'casting' mannequins, I avoided the need for child actors. This turned out to be both practical and creatively fortunate. Since the child mannequins we purchased for the production were plain white and faceless, the characters had somehow become 'generic', making them representational of all children. As they were made of a cloth material, they had no race or gender. This allowed them the ability to play multiple characters by swapping out their wardrobe for each scene. We had purchased a seven-year-old and a three-year-old mannequin and each one

was used twice in the production: the older one was used to play Freddy Trump Jr, as well as a six-year-old version of my mother; the younger mannequin playing Donald Trump, was also the two-year-old version of myself.

Dolls

Image 9: Product marketing photo of Vasily Zaitsev 1/6 scale Figure from the DID corporation (2019).

I was still undecided about using actors for the adult characters. While doing research on the uniforms of Soviet soldiers during World War II, I happened upon a realistic looking 12-inch action figure. This doll was in fact a replica of Jude Law from the film *Enemy at the Gates*, where he plays famous Russian sniper Vasily Zaitsev. I could not have asked for a better 'person' to cast

in the role of the Russian soldier in my second episode. The posable figure came with a fully designed wardrobe that included a realistic rifle. I had discovered that I could purchase a variety of different clothes for 12-inch figures, as well as head attachments. And in order to cast the character of Fred Trump Sr, I had purchased a three-piece suit and the head of a character named Sergeant Major Wolfram, which I would use to replace Jude Law's head attachment. Unfortunately, we were not able to take off the boots of the Russian soldier in order to use the dress shoes that came with the suit. Luckily the distressed army boots are not easily visible.

There were a few Asian female action figures available for purchase, but many were of an 'Anime' style of appearance. I opted to purchase a poseable headless female figure, an Asian female head, and a bathrobe. The hair was long and coloured brown because I couldn't find one in black. We later cut the hair to look less sultry. Interestingly, a bathrobe for a 12-inch figure is nearly the same price as a regular sized bathrobe.

The use of dolls became an inadvertent symbolic reference to the play of children. A 2020 UK study investigated the neuroscience of doll play in children and discovered that the use of their imagination helped in the development of their social, emotional and language skills. The study investigates how "doll play may provide a unique opportunity for children to practice social interactions important for developing social-emotional skills, such as empathy." (Hashmi, Vanderwert, Price, & Gerson, 2020). It seems that the playing with dolls is a means of fostering better mental health.

Image 10: Mark Hogencamp in his garden adjusting some of his 1/6th figures of SS men and paratroopers. Photograph: Tim Knox for the Guardian (2015).

The subject of the documentary *Marwencol* details the story of how Mark Hogancamp utilizes 12-inch action figures as a form of therapy to help him recover from a horrific assault that left him in a coma. Hogancamp creates his own World War II storyline, where action figures play out a narrative that involves the hero—a doll that represents himself—getting captured by the S.S. and then tortured. A team of female allies come to his rescue, in effect, rescuing his psyche by rewriting the trauma surrounding his assault.

The use of dolls in *Hallway* hints at such memory remediation. Only the "villains" of the piece are portrayed by dolls. I wonder if by doing this we see the adults as less menacing because they are playthings.

Earlier I mentioned that I wanted to make each scene taken from the child's perspective. Note that throughout the 360° video, I situated the camera directly between the trauma-inducing adult and victimized child. Thus, when the viewer looked straight towards the

adult, we are seeing them from the child's perspective. But in the reverse perspective, the camera is closer to the child, making it less from the adult's perspective, and more a vantage for the viewer to observe the child's reaction.

Shooting and Post-production

Image 11: Unaltered 360° photo of the Russian Soldier doll.

All the figures and mannequins were shot at the York University campus studios against a green screen backdrop. Unlike Cinespace, the campus studios were open during the summer months. Only stills were taken of the dolls. A second day of shooting occurred a month later for the live action forest background.

Most of the time and effort was put into the post-production. At first, I was reluctant to put in voiceover. But after receiving feedback on the first rough cut, it was apparent that voiceover was necessary.

Image 12: Still from MRI footage.

Footage from the MRI of my mother's L2 vertebrae fracture was used. I did not realize that the CD ROM that the hospital had given us contained such imagery. I was happy to include that footage as part of this work.

Unreal and Production Design

Thanks to Future Cinema course instructor, Taien Ng-Chan, I was put in touch with fourth year student Rafael Medici, who was quite adept with working with the "Unreal" video game engine. This saved me the laborious task of having to learn a very complicated piece of software. I purchased several 3D model assets, like the affluent living room, a Japanese style home interior, and basic looking kitchen. Rafael was able to take these assets and assemble them in the virtual 3D environment and essentially perform the production design. From inside Unreal, we found the

placement of the camera and he took 360° stills of the environment that were then imported into my editing system.

After speaking with my mother, she explained to me that her childhood home interior was that of a Japanese design. This kind of asset was easier to find and purchase. In the hopes of accurately depicting the architecture and interior design of Korean homes during the World War II era, it was a relief to hear from her that her home was Japanese in style as Korea was still colonized by the Japanese at the time. After researching the many different styles of home interiors within Korea during 1943, being tasked with rebuilding a Japanese interior was luckily an easier option.

Fire, Ice and Water

Early in the storyboard stage, I had designed the climax of each episode to end with a visual effect flourish. In each case, the "child" of each chapter goes through an elemental transformation: fire, ice and water respectively. Once the child has their transformation, the immediate surroundings were to be affected by the same element. The implementation of each visual effect had its own challenges.

Image 13: Storyboard of "Fire".

The "fire" effect turned out to be the simplest as it only required my purchasing of pre-existing fire VFX elements and overlaying them in different locations on top of the image. I found a website selling a collection of 'window fires' that are typically used to recreate the look of a building on fire from the outside. I reimagined the use of them by having the fires coming into the living room through the windows.

Image 14: Still from the FIRE scene from 'Hallway' (2021).

Image 15: Storyboard of "Ice".

The 'ice' was more difficult as it required the creation of each individual piece in photoshop, and then applying a special dissolve to each element which gave the illusion that the ice forms were growing and spreading on top of the image. And just as the fire elements, fog and cold breath effect were added on top of the image to further reinforce the illusion of a cold environment.

Image 16: Still from the ICE scene from 'Hallway' (2021).

Image 17: Storyboard of "Water".

The water scene was the most difficult to render. The "child" was made to look like it was transforming into water. A large bowl of water was filmed with a 360° camera hanging above it. The image of the waves was then overlayed onto the image, carefully rotoscoping out the chairs around the edges to look like it was rising within the kitchen. A considerable amount of time was also spent making the water rising on the legs of each character.

Image 18: Still from the WATER scene from 'Hallway' (2021).

Chapter Five: Dissemination

Having sent *Zoetrope* to a number of 360° video/VR festivals, it remains to be seen if this is a worthwhile endeavour to continue. I am generally weary about submitting my work to festivals, mainly due to the fact I am less interested in the distribution side of it all. The cachet that festival awards and laurels afford a piece of work often acts as a currency. It seems as though VR festivals are going the same route as film festivals, and many well-established film festivals are curating a digital wing for their programming that allows for VR content. But since the pandemic has forced most festival viewing online, I question what exactly the dissemination of a piece like this means. Ultimately *Hallway* will end up solely online.

If I had my druthers, I would like to see *Hallway* projected on the inside of a dome in a gallery space. That would be an ambitious undertaking that requires having to align myself with a gallery that is looking to activate such a project. But a special exhibition like that is not likely to happen anytime soon; I will have to be content with having to present it as an online piece only.

A good amount of 360° content is typically viewed using a VR headset and is mainly geared towards gaming experiences. Facebook is taking the lead with their Oculus Quest headsets. They recently rolled out their next generation headset, the Quest II in 2020, which is much lighter than the previous iteration, and less expensive with a faster CPU. But regardless of the gaming aspect of VR, is anyone watching 360° films?

Image 19: Still from 'Pearl' (2017).

In 2017, the 360° film *Pearl* was nominated for an Academy Award in the best short animated film category. The idea of a 360° film getting nominated sounds like a watershed moment for VR, but it turns out that the academy was sent a non-360° theatrical version for consideration. Learning of this fact has given me the idea to also create a non-360° version by reframing the project. I could potentially send out that version to normal film festivals.

Since headsets are not very commonplace, VR content in general isn't very widely distributed. I will not focus on this too much, as it is difficult to have any piece of content seen by a large audience. I believe that the best way to view *Hallway* is as an immersive experience through a headset. Luckily anyone with an Oculus Quest has access to YouTube 360° content, which is where *Hallway* currently resides. That said, I would imagine that the majority of viewers

for this piece will see it on a computer, or their mobile device, without a headset. Not having seen the piece with a headset myself, I am currently fine with this mode of dissemination.

The original concept for this thesis was to make it a web-series. Each episode was to be a stand-alone piece. The idea was to make it modular, where it did not matter which episode you started from. But as the project evolved, it has become a single linear piece. Rather than making 'time' something the audience can manipulate in its viewing, I have let the audience adjust the 'space'.

Perhaps I have painted myself into a corner by creating a 360° piece; meaning that I do not have a roadmap for the widespread dissemination of *Hallway*. I can be patient with it, until I find such a path. My 2019 feature film *Gyopo* had its festival life/participation halted by the pandemic and it has yet to find distribution.

I made this film with the intent that it could find its way to an audience that is in need of a better understanding their own traumas. If the film can do that, it would be best to have it catch the attention of a large group of people. I will not begin to understand how a film goes 'viral'. But as a work of art, there is a notion that scarcity imbues value to it. Major film festivals often have a 'premier policy'. I will tread lightly in how this piece gets showcased.

Recall my contention that I believe everybody has some form of trauma. And because I made a film about trauma, it is trying to speak to everybody. It is my hope to potentially help shed a light on the viewers' own childhood trauma and, in doing so, help them with their healing process.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen is if this project is a successful work of art as a VR piece. In her article "Where next for virtual reality art?", Gabrielle Schwarz writes:

> Perhaps it's here that the significance of artistic experimentation with VR lies – in the ability of artists to work in a different direction from the technology they use, so that it becomes not just the tool but also the subject of a practical investigation into its fundamental nature. (Schwarz, 2019)

The purpose of an MFA thesis project is to push the boundaries of what the artist is capable of creating. I did not want to make something 'old hat'. Through the MFA program, I explored new ways to create cinema. Although COVID-19 had stymied that progress for a time, I am satisfied with my experiences in the making of this film.

The film ends with my narration stating that I still experience anxiety. My battles with my mental health are ongoing. But I am driven to reacquaint myself with the state of liberation I experienced before the pandemic had triggered my anxieties once again.

My Buddhist leanings initiated my research into the concept of enlightenment. "It would seem, however, that the existence of an autonomous, self-regulating psyche is nature's higher purpose." (Maté, *When the body says no: the cost of hidden stress*, 2003). For me, it is a day-to-day process. Ironically the completion of this support paper was a great source of anxiety for me. Although the timeline for finishing a thesis can happen at the student's leisure, I placed an undue amount of stress upon myself to finish it before September. Relative to the completion of the film itself, the support paper gave me much consternation. Which leads me to ask, why was it giving me so much anxiety? A perfectionist compulsion in me wishes to deliver a document that is worthy of being an academic paper that will eventually be made publicly available. However, I am not an academic, and perhaps I fear looking foolish. Much of that fear has its roots in an

irrational sense of feeling rejected, just as I had perceived my mother rejecting me as a child when she left the house for work. The act of making any work of art, or even an academic paper, is a cry for validation. We ask the world to pay us some amount of attention. And so, we make a spectacle in order to be seen as our childhood selves, deprived of nurturing attachment, continuously seek it out.

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