

Mat Laibowitz - Assignment #1

Question 1 – Narrative of Deeply Engaging Situation

I was recently deeply engaged while designing a new musical gadget. It is a controller to be used during a performance to compose musical patterns in real time while the performance is going on. It will also be used to modify and affect the sounds that the instruments are synthesizing. It is often the case that I feel deeply engaged while creating something new. Novelty is a very important attribute for me with respect to engagement. Novelty can come in many forms, in this case it is the very literal creation of something new, but it can also be a new point of view of something familiar or a new situation for the engagement.

However, novelty on its own might not be enough to increase the depth of engagement. I have been involved in many new situations that have felt quite shallow and disengaging. It usually requires something beyond novelty. In the case of the musical controller project it is the ownership I felt towards the project. I was designing something that I wanted to use for my own content creation and experience. There is more motivation to work on it, to be involved, and to contribute at the best of one's ability. This is much more engaging than if the project is for some minimal reward like a boss' approval. I think the concept of motivation is important for engagement.

Another thought that made this experience deeply engaging is the endless possibilities for where it might lead. The obvious example is that this work might open the doors for many new musical compositions and exciting performance situations. While this can be lumped in with the concept of motivation, it is more specifically the feeling that more deep engagement is ahead, and not only just that there is more to come, it is apparently ever increasing in quality and individuality. I guess the point there is that activity that is a precursor to a high quality of deep engagement can be in and of itself deeply engaging for no other reason.

I think uniqueness is also an attribute of deep engagement. This is different than novelty. For me, the word unique implies new thoughts and new situations, basically novelty on a deeper level.

One other thing that made this particular experience deeply engaging is the fact that even though the process mostly occurs in front of a computer or reading through component catalogs, it can not be done well without experiences as a performing musician. The engagement brings up personal memories and thoughts about these experiences and adds to them a new layer of trying to gain insight on how to better design this gadget. Furthermore, it puts you in a place of picturing yourself in a new set of experiences using the gadget which is the embodiment of your past experiences. At this point it becomes much more than what is in front of you, there is an imaginative element and a timelessness surrounding it.

The fact that the engagement requires some specific background or insight gives it individuality, in fact, it makes it almost exclusive. In my opinion, this is an essential attribute of deep engagement. Deeply engaging situations invoke something particular about the audience. In general, I find things that are intended for too general of an audience to be shallow and uninteresting, such as many of the films Hollywood puts out. Whereas films that may take multiple viewings to understand or require some intimate knowledge seem to captivate me at a much deeper level.

That's not to say that shallow things are not enjoyable. I love a good campy film or mindless action movie. But I just don't feel they are deeply engaging. Sometimes I prefer things that are shallow; they are familiar, relaxing, and just plainly enjoyable. That is my final point, it is not enough to say that something that is enjoyable, or personal, or invokes an emotion, is by definition deeply engaging because there are many examples of shallow and barely engaging situations that have all of these attributes.

Question 2 – Comparison of Media Experiences

I watched two films for this exercise. They were both Japanese horror films. The first film was *Uzumaki* which means spiral in Japanese and it was directed by Higuchinsky who is a mixed-media filmmaker who uses elements of stop-motion animation, cell animation, computer animation, and sculpture in a live action film. The second film was *Tomie*, directed by Ataru Oikawa.

Both films start off in a very similar way. The settings are seemingly normal, a small town in *Uzumaki* and a suburban district in *Tomie*, and the initial pacing in both films is quite slow. Slowly strange occurrences begin to happen. In *Uzumaki*, characters are introduced that are acting strangely, such as filming a snail for days on end or painting spirals everywhere. The strangeness, at first, is just odd enough to invoke some curiosity. At this point, the film is at its

most deeply engaging point. It centers on a feeling of uneasiness, uncertainty about what is coming next, and a growing curiosity. Unfortunately, this is about as interesting as the plot every got. It degenerated into a very standard story about an unseen entity that could be considered madness objectified taking the shape of a spiral. Being a fan of this genre I can probably list many films and books that have this exact same story about a group falling into collective madness and the last sane person trying to fight it. Essentially it stopped being captivating by generation of curiosity. However, the film has moments of visual brilliance, amazing use of colors, and hidden spirals that are usually located just out of the main frame of action. These elements add a whole new level to the experience, even if it is no more than just the constant looking for hidden spirals in the images. And in the end, the movie does surprise with a few twists and new plot elements, almost as if a reward for staying with it. Overall and mainly thanks to these additional twists, the film left a somewhat lasting impression. Considering that it might not be possible to acknowledge deep engagement at the time of the engagement without being less engaged because of the realization, the impression something leaves may be an essential attribute of deep engagement.

The main character in the second movie, Tsukiko, has had a traumatic experience that she cannot remember. Everyone who knows about the experience has been lying to her about what actually happened so she is trying hypnotherapy. At the same time, a detective is investigating a string of brutal murders. The main point of engagement is the wondering of how these two storylines are going to meet. Once again, the engagement attributes of uncertainty and curiosity are present. This film has some quite interesting characters, especially the hypnotherapist who seemingly has an entire history that is interesting but never revealed to the audience. The events that Tsukiko cannot remember become clear to the audience before she can figure them out herself. Further dramatic irony exists as the special ability of rebirth that the title character, Tomie, is revealed to the viewer as the investigator can't seem to figure out how he is so many murder cases where the same girl is killed. This movie builds up to a gory and mostly uninteresting conclusion.

I think both these films really point out how the uncovering of information and the unknown can be quite engaging. It is further illustrated by the films' loss of engagement when these elements were revealed.

Question 3 – List of Attributes

Novelty (but not on its own)

Ownership

Motivation

Uniqueness

Timelessness

Imaginative

Exclusive

Curiosity

Uncertainty

Uneasiness

Lasting Impression

Wonder

Dramatic Irony / Omniscience