

Project Three report on

An experimental film on Alienation

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Approval sheet

This Communication Design Project report entitled “An experimental film on alianation” by Mrinal Biswas is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Master of Design degree in Communication Design.

3rd June

Project Guide:



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Declaration

I hereby declare that this written submission submitted to IDC, IIT Bombay, is a record of an original work done by me. This written submission represents my ideas in my words, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misprinted or falsified any Idea/ fact/ source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Mrinal Biswas
3rd June 2019

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Mrinal Biswas
3rd June 2013

Abstract



The term 'Alienation' means a feeling of exclusion, coming apart of essence and existence. As human beings, we are always trying to achieve a better quality of life. However in modern society, we do not seem to exercise a will or consciousness or design. We just do as we are told. We act in a mechanical way. Although human beings are essentially productive, this system molded us in such a way, that we feel most human when we are away from work. We feel human by means of consumption, which is a parody in itself, making us as similar to other beings possessing the same qualities. Due to this, the most important quality, the 'creative' part of us is being ignored. Any form of human creativity can lead to an eventual improvement of a skill/art, but in the assembly line structured systems that's not possible. Maybe in such a system, we achieve increased production, but if we only value human life by economic profits, then we are vastly limiting our potential.

In this project, I attempt to address some basic problems of alienation which are well known around us. Though those problems are not clearly identified as major life-threatening issues of our society, the number of people who are suffering from this state is not negligible. As an outcome of this project, I have chosen to use a short movie as a medium to communicate my thought.

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Introduction

In this project, the main inspiration was mainly philosophical and social subjects. Initially, during the primary research, I tried to understand the main effects of alienation in our society through literature and philosophical study. Following that, I attempted to create multiple narratives regarding the same topic. I have chosen film as a medium, because I found, audio-visual as the best medium to communicate this idea which surrounds us. The warped sense of time and space, that I wanted to represent, was possible only through moving images. The film is mainly is an experimental one. I've tried to capture the emotional part mostly rather than the aesthetic or by following the conventional structure of the film. Though, before making the short I tried to understand how films are structured, I did not bind myself with those rules, later on, and tried to do justice to that particular subject of alienation.

Understanding Alienation



"Nobody Knows anything."
- Socrates

Socrates: Anybody wanting to be an expert in any domain they have to understand the principles on which they were acting in that domain. Otherwise they would be just like cooks, they are interested based on a kind of empirical feedback. They just know what pleases people. However, that isn't what you should have. If you understand the domain, you would have a theoretical understanding. Cooks know from experience what taste good but doctors have a theory about what is actually good for you. Unconditional commitment gives eternity in time. Then your life has meaning in term of this commitment.

Following this thought, the world began to follow and practice every aspect of life on the basis of logic, putting emotional connections and attachments secondary. This can very well be pointed out as one of the prime reasons of alienation.



*“Life can only be understood backwards,
But must be lived forwards.”*

- Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard: In his philosophy, Kierkegaard said unconditional commitment doesn't get reinterpreted. If you ever get one of these defining relations, it is that in terms of which everything else gets reinterpreted. So everything is seen as something, leading up to this experience. If you ever give it up then it would be interpreted as a complete betrayal of yourself and you'd be similar to a zombie, like an emotionless being.

In some notes he writes 'As I grew up, I opened my eyes and saw the real world, and I began to laugh and I haven't stopped since. I saw that meaning of life was to be a high court judge, the brightest joy of love was to marry a well-off girl, the wisdom was what the majority said it was, the passion was to give a speech, courage was to risk being fined ten dollars, cordiality was to say "you're welcome" after a meal, and that the fear of God was to go to communion once a year. That's what I saw and I laughed.'

Kierkegaard's words can be interpreted as defining constants in life, from things around us, giving us meaning in life. Thus, a lack of such constants alienates us from our human existence.



Kafka: Writings of Franz Kafka inspired me to understand the alienated perspective of a person. Especially his book, 'Metamorphosis', showed the almost actual representation about the topic what I had come to know so far. Being a bug instead of a person leading a mundane day-to-day human life, in a society where no one can relate with you, is one of the major consequences of being alienated. Even in the starting of the book, when the protagonist finds himself as a bug, he was not bothered about his metamorphosis. He was instead worried about how he will get up and reach his office like every single day. His parents never understood him. He wasn't able to express his situation to other people.

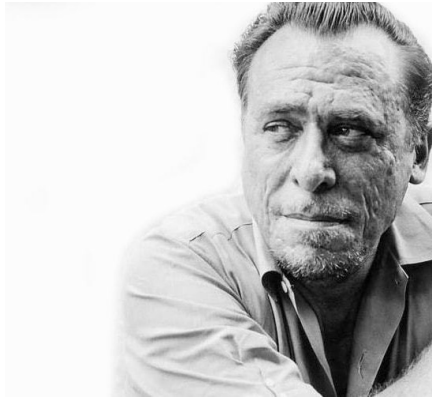
"The meaning of life is that it stops."
- Kafka



*“Don’t compromise yourself.
You are all you’ve got.”*
- Janis Joplin

Janis Joplin: Janis was one of the major vocals of 60’s rock music. She was direct about her lyrics and loud in all her stage performances. The exhaustion of war, the pressure of society, the misogynist mindset was all that she wanted to bring out and shatter through her songs.

In a song named “A woman left lonely ” she wrote, “A simple conversation for the new men now and again, Makes a touchy situation when a good face come into your head.” We can clearly see how someone is trying hard to communicate with another, but are being unable to do so, leading to a rise in utter frustration. Even in her voice, the loneliness we hear is raw, wounded and an out-of-the-world experience.



Charles Bukowski: With his dirty realism Bukowski introduced us to a new realm of society. Where we can see such perspective which was so-called unsure or the hidden closet of the human mind. Without being romantic about the surroundings he was trying to understand the truth of human nature. He wrote “The flesh covers the bone and they put a mind in there. and sometimes a soul.” He clearly denied the individuality of the human being in modern society. The action of being alive only becomes a mechanical way to live.

“If you’re losing your soul and you know it, then you’ve still got a soul left to lose.”
- Bukowski

Film study



In Picture: Jacques Tati's Playtime (1967)

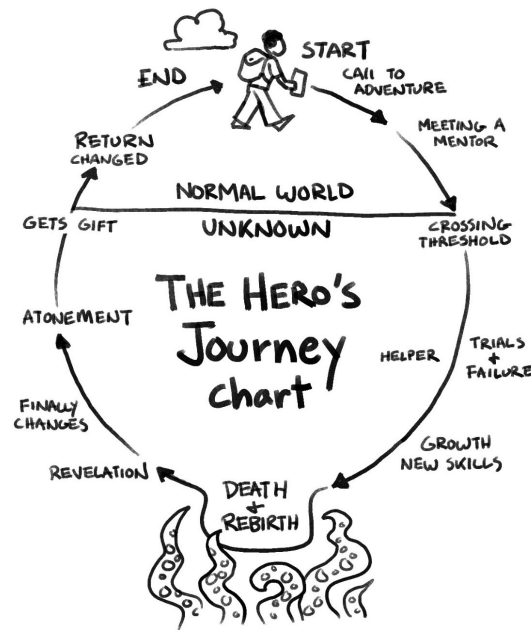
Charlie Chaplin: Chapline did some of the major work in this topic. specially with is socialist point of view he showed us how a person's dream and the society's dream can conflict through may of his films like Modern Times (1936), City Lights (1931), The Kid (1921)

Michelangelo Antonioni: Antonioni's alianation trilogy is one of the milestone in this subject. His works like Red Desert (1964), L'Avventura (1960) are one of the greatest works. He used landscape as an emotional portrait of human. The color is also showed the emotion that the character is going through.

Jacque Tati: Jacque tati's playtime (1967) is one of the well representation of future. Where the world become only a copy-paste culture. People live in boxes. Work in boxes, without wisdom. Only through some refection you can identify the outside world.

Krzysztof Kieślowski: Kiselowski's color trilogy is one another influential work in this domain. Specially Blue(1993) is one of the most important work. Throughout the film he portrait the struggle between the self and the other world.

Design Approach



In picture: Hero's journey of a story

After the background study the main work was to narrow down the topic and try to understand why people feel such. Here In the project I was trying to show the reason behind the feeling. One of the major that I've understand that people feel not so much connected because of there ignorance of the concuss desire. In this mechanical world people cannot cop up with there long for the better life.

As a medium I've chosen film. Where I've tried to portrait the topic from my point of view with a fictional story structure. To understand the structure of the the film I've go through several films and there design architecture. Letter on I was not limited myself with the laws and try to find a better way to represent the topic.

The film

Log Line: What happens when a 26-year-old boy living in a metal jungle realizes he is too small to fight his giants.

Inciting Incident: With no personal connections to his colleagues or job, he lives his everyday 10-7 job as only a task that needs to be done. Until one day, when his boss puts blame on him for something he hasn't even done; he realizes he has had enough. He doesn't get paid enough to deal with a job that doesn't give peace of mind or the support the hours he puts in travel and dedication. So, he walks out dejected, and defeated by life and realizes he isn't even strong enough to face himself, his past or his tomorrow anymore.

Conscious desire: To earn lots of money and secure the future of his family and young sister who hail from a financial handicap background.

Unconscious desire: He wants to be drowned in his passion of art and wants to make a living out of it.

Character Description

Maddu Murali is a 26 year old boy hailing from the small town of Krishnanagar. His family consists of his father, mother and little sister. He came to the big city of Mumbai to pursue his career as a computer engineer in Shenoy Studios. While being born as a Hindu, Maddu has no religious orientation. He believes in living his life as it comes every day, without much imminent dreams or hopes for the future.

His clearest goal in mind as of now is to give a good education for his 16 year old sister, get her married, and get the family out of the small town even though they have no wish of leaving, because he knows of the many hardships that they face that could be eased out in a bigger city.

He has no attachment towards any person or things, and so his house only consists of bare necessities and nothing to indicate his leisure. He believes forming unnecessary bonds only leads to heartbreaks because ultimately, everybody is alone and nobody owes anyone anything. He is not a fan of appearances and finds it a waste of time to put on airs to impress people. Something, for which he regularly gets schooled by his boss as his job involves a lot of that.

He is a wallflower, so he is good at judging people's intentions through body languages, something he considers a very important trait once he came to the big city full of millions of people. It was important to distinguish friend from foe. He is an empath, so he doesn't judge people based on a point of view and realizes that everybody is the way they are because they have lived their life in a way that made them that way. He tries to look at people's point of view through their eyes and so hates when people gossip about others. This is also why, he cannot form bonds with people, because to him they are all books that he reads without getting invested in one.

He is afraid of the dark, so he always has a light on somewhere in his house. He justifies it by telling himself that it'll be easier to see at night, but he is just afraid to be all alone in an empty house without being able to see the unknown. But he is a proud man, so he never lets himself believe otherwise.

Music is his means of escape because he feels like the lyrics carry his message way better than he can ever do. He finds that he can live their lives from the window of his balcony at it soothes him. He is an occasional reader, but has no favorite genre, so he has books of all types. This is mainly, so that he doesn't get biased towards a particular way of living.

Swapan Sir (Age mid 50's, tall, unmarried): Art teacher of a small primary school. Love to read philosophy and poetry. He teaches basics of drawing in the same school from the last twenty years. He believes that there is a huge potential in every student and drawing can spark that. He is popular among students because of his storytelling power. Every day he comes to school wearing a kurta-pyjama with a long bag containing some charcoal pencil, one notebook and some local magazines. People say he had a huge potential to do something if he would have stayed in Kolkata. Nobody knows why he still struggling in this small city. Every Saraswati puja he organizes an art competition which is popular among all the local children, and the school art exhibition is one of the attractions. During his school days, he was a bright student. Though his parents wanted him to become a lawyer he chooses to become a painter. He left his home at the age of sixteen and did not come back for fifteen years. After coming back he started his own drawing coaching school.

Maddu (At the age of 10): He is in class four now. His father is a banker and mother housewife. He is not so good in academics but he loves to draw spatially people and landscapes. His parents are worried about his unsettled mind. Though he is not good in maths his father thinks by practice he can overcome that. He thinks Maddu is not good in that only because he is not giving his full concentration. He won a lot of prizes in a local drawing competition. His parents are proud of that. They are planning to increase the number of private tuition for better results but Maddu doesn't want that. He fears that probably at the end of summer vacation his study time will increase.

Setting

2019 Mumbai, India. It's the month of May, and with temperatures rising torrentially, the heats getting to people's head. It's impossible to get to work after 8 or leave before 7. Elections are just around the corner and everybody's at the edge. Huge posters adorn the streets of Mumbai, coupled with slogans and parades. Rush hours become more hectic, with the onslaught of traffic and their blaring horns. One could compare them to the rising steam of tea.

Inside, his one BHK house, of course, is a different scene altogether. It's quiet and serene. It's his solace. With bare minimum furniture to himself, his only luxury is a fridge. So, in the blaring May heat he needs to hang by the balcony to cool off. But this time, he is above all traffic and the hum and bustle of the streets. He is untouched by humanity's daily struggle.

His bedroom is only always lit with a blue night lamp, that soothes him off to sleep. His room is very tidy because doesn't like to leave much mark of living out there and an untidy room usually means a lot of activity for a living.

Maddu owns only one pair of work shoes and a house slipper. His range of clothes includes three office clothes that he alternates between and four in-door clothes. There is a bedside drawer full of post-it notes where he writes random ideas of paintings he gets once in a while, crumbles them and puts them in. That drawer has a year worth of ideas hidden neatly inside, the only mark to prove he is still human. He never looks into them, just writes one and tosses them inside, the only mark to prove he is still human. He never looks into them, just writes one and tosses them inside, just so that he doesn't need to acknowledge their existence.

The Story

Maddu lives his everyday life trying to blend in with the crowd. The same job, the same traffic, the same food, the same shows online, the same sleep time for him, nothing more, nothing less. His life is an endless loop of existence, with nothing extraordinary to fill his days or dreams for the future, and that gives him solace. It means he won't miss out on anything. It means he won't yearn for anything. The only ever thoughts he gets that differ from his life, he quickly writes them down in a post it and crumbles them away. He doesn't dare disturb the normalcy of his life. He is living his life for his family, and that brings a sense of calm in him because he can look at his work calculatively and with logic rather than with empathy that he can't quantify. But that's not all there is to life, and Maddu feels that he is missing out on something he doesn't know what of. There is an absence, a feeling of no-purpose that always keeps him on edge. So his eyes wander a lot, through people and their actions, in order to give meaning to what he has or a lack thereof. Until he hits rock bottom one day. Until he gets blamed for a mistake he hasn't even done, and he realizes he has had enough.

Because you can't continue on with something, you aren't even sure of yourself. Coupled with the news of a man from his past dying, for the first time, he doesn't know what he is doing anymore. Or what he needs to do. For starters, he didn't even know his art teacher from his elementary was alive; he hasn't thought about him for years and buried him like the rest of his past. So he shouldn't be as bothered by it as he feels, and plus he knows the norm; people die all the time. That's their sole purpose after they are born. And when they are gone, they take a part of them and their surroundings with them.

So dejected, morally broken and hopeless Maddu finds himself back to his room, a place where he could be away from society and at peace. But something was different. There was no peace inside. Some part of the society found its way in and bothered him throughout. Something very minute that you can't quite pinpoint at; something like the quilt is kind of itchy no matter how you turn, or the fan keeps making that weird noise that it didn't before. And he can't be absolutely sure, but he swears the plant he kept by the

the window every day is now moved towards the door. But he is not sure, because he doesn't pay attention. Did he change it before leaving?

So he unloads all the day's worth of crumbled papers inside his bedside drawer and shuts it just as fast. That's his day gone by.

And when he lays down, the bed seems infinite. Was it always this big? And what's the weird pain in his chest? Should he consult someone? He always diagnosed it himself, but this is a first and he has no idea why it pains so. He was always used to being alone, so why is he feeling lonely today? Why does he crave for a soft hand caress his hair and the familiar jingle of conch shell bangles as the hand moves? So with a sigh that seemed to arise from the bottom of his pit, he curls up in his huge bed tightly, feeling the first cold daze that went through his spine in this very hot May night. And he started to sing himself a lullaby. He has never done so, so it's a surprise he even knows such a tune, but when he opens his eyes, they are the song from his mother's throat and he is lying peacefully on her lap.

It's summer. But not the kind where you would breathe under a parched dry sun, but the one that's humid and forms sweat droplets on ur skin. And the one that brings with it a numbing aroma of mangoes. He is sleeping on his mother's lap in the verandah as she is fanning him with a hand fan and the sun has almost reached the end

of their room lighting everything it touched in a brilliant blaze of golden fire.

Maddu jumps up to life and as he does, he is now a 10 year old boy in just shorts. He runs inside and grabs a hold of an old notebook and crayons and races out with the sounds of his mother calling behind him to come back before dark to study. Maybe he heard her, maybe he didn't, but all he knew was that here, at this point in time, he was free. And he ran and he ran, as far as his tiny legs could take, until his knees buckled and he fell in a field of grass, laughing.

He breathed in the fresh air and for the first time in a long time, he felt alive!

He looked at the people going at their daily lives, but this time they weren't individuals doing their specific work because they had to; they were simple humans enjoying their walk in the sun as they went to who knows where. People diving into a lake because it was hot, not because they needed to get ready for somewhere. Kids eating mangoes together because they loved the taste of it. When was life so simple?

When did he stop looking at life so simply?

He got up, sat upright and looked into the horizon and saw things that didn't exist. Things that he will create in the boundaries of his pages.

And as he starts to draw, a shadow creeps up from behind him. He looks up to the silhouette of a man towering him, a man whose face he can't recall, a man whose face he has long forgotten.

“What did I tell you about colouring out of the box?”

says his gentle voice.

Maddu looks down to his page where the colors have left some of the boundaries and whispers meekly, “Uh, do it?”

The man laughs heartily and sits down next to him. Maddu continues to draw without acknowledging him. They both sit silently looking at the setting sun over the horizon.

“Honestly,” continues the faceless man, “Color however you want, who am I to tell you how not to. I mean, there is no right and wrong way about painting what you see right?” He taps lightly on Maddu’s head.

The man looks down at a trail of ants carrying food to somewhere.

“What do you want to do when you grow up?” he asks nonchalantly.

“Hmm? I want to paint.” Maddu shrugs.

The man gives out another hearty laugh and then quiets down.

“Wait, seriously?” Maddu nods quietly and continues to draw, not looking up. It was an absurd question for him, of course, he is going to draw. The man pushes one ant out of the trail and watches it scutter back to its rightful position, continuing like he didn’t just lose his way out.

“Why?” Maddu doesn’t answer right away. He continues to draw, but inside, he contemplates the question. Of how profusely complicated the answer is to the simple ‘why’. Then he continues with a childlike innocence

“Because I love doing it. Because when I look at a blank sheet of paper, there are infinite things I could draw and it’ll become a part of this world. I like seeing things I imagine come to life. Like look, this is what I created, it matters. Possibilities.”

The man looks at him for a long time and then gives a faceless smile
“Remember it when you wake up.”

And the world whooshes out. And Maddu is back in his room. But this time he isn’t crawled as tightly as before, but sprung on all four and breathing rapidly. A single drop of tear roll down. A sudden nameless sorrow, of not even remembering a face. Of how vastly and yet how little people touch people’s lives.

He sits up just as slowly as he could and looks at his drawer, contemplating. With a pause that seemed to stretch out for eternity, he pulls it open and it’s full to the brim. He pulls out a single crumbled sheet and in it is written, “Color however you want”.

Maddu gets up from his bed, puts on a cup of coffee and searches through his stuff. Pulls out a neat looking notepad, a pen for a lack of pencil thereof takes his coffee and goes to his balcony.

He looks at the blank sheet of paper for a long time as the first rays of the sun hit it and he whispers, “Possibilities.”

Then he starts to sketch. A new day has come.

Production and Post- Production



Role played by:

Maddu: Shравan Murali,
Industrial Design Student of
IDC school of design, IDC, IIT
Bombay, Batch of 2017-19.



Swapan Sir: Sujit Saha,
Theater artist, Krishnagar
Nadia, West bengal.



In picture: Two frames from the film

Locations: The city part is Kanjurmarg, near IIT Bombay. The office inside location was in IDC, IIT Bombay.

The room location was in Hostel 14, IIT Bombay.

The home and riverside location was in Krishnagar, small city of West Bengal.

Camera: Mostly Cannon EOS 1300D is used. for lens 18-55 kit lens and 50mm 1.8f stop lens is used.

Editing: Adobe premiere pro CC 2015 was the editing platform.

Frames from the film





Conclusion

The idea that I wanted to convey was possible with the medium of film. It also was the first time I tried my hand at the genre of fiction. Another aspect which I learned about was the rhythm of the film. The story and the script being the skeletons of the any film project, I realized their importance in the process of this particular project. An attempt at making an abstract film helped me proceed for the final one, since the previous film taught me the importance of a strong script. Also, it taught me the difference and uniqueness of both the art of photography and the audio-visual medium.

Apart from the above mentioned aspects, the technicalities of the process of film-making were also very educational. Right from handling the camera to the uniqueness of the craft of film-making.

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