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Personal Reflection

My experience of collaboration at university has been a rollercoaster. Each venture has been quite challenging. So I was apprehensive about embarking on a collaborative assignment. I decided to approach it with an open mind and hopeful heart. I was excited about the challenges and growth ahead of me and the prospect of learning from others.

I chose the subject of MACHINE as it feels particularly relevant for the 21st century experience, where machines are increasingly intertwined with our lives. As Ferrari et al. aptly puts it, the lines between the human and the mechanical have been blurred.

Despite approaching the task with an unbiased and friendly attitude, my group decided not to participate or engage with me, so I was left alone to realise the project.

During my year abroad on student exchange in Spain, I was fortunate to have studied video art and experimental cinema as part of my curriculum. This opened my creative mind to the visual art of moving images.

Inspired by this newly found passion, I decided to use archival footage to create a short film, and with the support from seminar discussions and my tutors Sian Macfarlane and Martin Bence, I settled on making a piece about the subject of CYBORG.

When I contemplate this theme, I immediately think about the human body as the ultimate machine. I decided to oscillate between the MACHINE and BODY topics, using the concept of CYBORG to examine the relationship between the human body and technology.

My tutor, Martin Bence, directed me to Donna Haraway's essay *The Cyborg Manifesto.* This work formed the conceptual basis of my project.

‘’It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what is body in machines (…). Insofar as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice (for example, the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimaeras’’ (Haraway, 2016: p. 60)

Using archival moving images and a video editor, I pieced together a short film in which I reflected on what the future holds for the human-machine relationship, considering our intrinsic need for constant improvement, evolution, prolonging life and cybernetics as an answer to the error in coding we call death.

When the short film was ready, I began to consider creative ways to present my results. I reached out to music producer Shaun Azrak and invited him to improvise a monologue synthesiser live-set in response to the film. It was an important step that not only elevated the presentation of my film, but provided a rare and refreshing positive experience of collaboration.

If I could change one thing about the project, it would be access to a better space for the presentation. I had envisioned the performance in a very dark room, large enough to invite an audience. Additionally, because of the restrictions with space, I was unable to set up a camera to film the performance. I had also wanted to bring an instrument which allows you to play on the human body, but sadly it did not arrive on time as it was posted from outside the UK.

By diving deeply into my chosen topic, I expanded my understanding and arrived upon ideas that I had not considered before like cybernetics and presenting work in the form of performance.
It encouraged me to think beyond my usual approach, to look in a different direction, study topics outside of photography, seek inspiration in alternative places, and feed them back to my visual art practice.

I was grateful for the opportunity to further my exploration of video art; I am very passionate about it and would like to keep integrating it into my practice.

Ultimately, I learned some valuable lessons about collaboration. I now understand that collaboration works if you choose who to work with. Collaborating with people I have decided to collaborate with has been the most

satisfying and enriching experience. I also understand that just because something doesn't work within the university environment, this doesn't mean it won't work in the outside world and I should still try it to see what it feels like and how it can benefit me.

Despite a mixed experience with collaboration, I got fully immersed in practice, which Aristotle defined as 'action that is valuable in itself (...)' (Boon and Levine, 2018:13) - I believe it to be the point of any artistic endeavour. I struggled, I lost, I won, I learned and I collaborated, but most importantly - I took action that is valuable in itself - I created.

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