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The Mobility of Bugs and Humans

Introduction

We are Bugs is a visual poem, paired with a reading of a written poem, which aligns with the visual cues in the video. The video works within the idea that bugs can act as representations and symbols of human life, motivation, and action. The video is meant to evoke a feeling of reflective thinking, as well as an awe of natural processes and cycles. This feeling is evoked by the soft guitar playing in the background, and the close up footage of insects going about their day on the screen, as well as the measured pace of the speaker. The visual poem includes shots of ants, a woolly caterpillar, a centipede, a yellow jacket, a green caterpillar, an aphid, mushrooms, as well as trees, people surrounding a bonfire, and my friends and I hiking in the forest along a mountain side.

We are Bugs challenges its viewers to consider the scale of the world in which mankind lives, and to take the time to consider the similarities between the bugs the speaker describes, and the viewer who watches. I made this video because I have always been fascinated by insects, and their ability to follow unspoken but instinctual natural laws, by which they live their lives. I truly feel their natural cycles of birth, life, mating, and death/hibernation is a miniature representation of the very same cycles by which we humans live. While some people may be offended by the thought that they are similar to a bug, I find it very reassuring. We, like bugs, are mobile creatures. I wanted to make the connection to my mobility as well as the mobility of others and the mobility

of bugs in order to demonstrate how we are all motivated by the same natural cycles and forces. Bugs are able to go anywhere, and work together while doing so. This reminded me of human initiatives, and how really we are all trying to be like bugs; capable of mobilizing easily, communicating fluidly, and achieving a common goal. I wanted the viewer to feel a deeper connection with insects, and that, if the bugs can do it, so can they. The mobility elements of this project have to do not only with the topic (bugs and humans) but also with the method of creation (over a long period of time, without intention of connecting them together). By making this project about mobility as well as with mobility, the project takes on a deeper meaning which is not immediately apparent to viewers without further explanation, but creates a more dynamic project.

Project Overview

I chose to make a video for my final project, because I have always enjoyed editing videos and I think that videos are a much more engaging and visually interesting thing for a viewer to participate in. In my opinion, videos do something that audio or 2D images alone are unable to do, which is completely envelop a viewer into a creator's work. By providing not only an auditory, but also visual experience, a creator can more easily manipulate the thoughts and feelings of a viewer, making projects more emotionally effective. For this reason, I thought *We are Bugs* would be most compelling if done through a video format, although I think there are ways to make an interesting audio piece about the connection between humans bugs using rustling/tiny footsteps of ants or other bugs, or even swarming sounds of bees and wasps, etc. This project uses footage of bugs and humans in nature in order to accomplish its goal of making viewers consider how humans and bugs are alike, and why.

Project Goals and Research Connection

As I wrote in my Mobile Media Video Project assignment, this video began and continued to grow, using found/old/shared footage. Only two of the shots were filmed after I discovered we were to do this project, because I really enjoyed the challenge of looking through archived videos in my camera roll, as well as the camera roll of my friends and family. I think that, while this element of the project is not clear to a viewer simply watching *We are Bugs*, it provides a new and interesting dimension to the project in relation to its mobility. This project would not have been possible if we did not have the mobility that smartphones provide us. Because I and those I know have mobile devices, we were able to capture these videos over the span of months and even years! *We are Bugs* was an exercise in gathering footage that was filmed with no intention of being strung together, and so making a concrete connection between them after the fact was a fun challenge. I chose to make this connection by editing all the footage in a similar fashion, and connecting them all with the audible poem.

Marsha Berry writes in “Making Films and Video Art with Smartphones”, that when she experienced an earthquake, she felt the need to film it as documentation. In the moment, she had no intention of using the video for anything other than proving she was in an earthquake (Berry, 133). Similarly, I and my friends and family filmed these bugs with no intention other than to say they saw a bug. And just as I decided to make this video, Berry later decided to use the earthquake video to make a piece of video artwork, labeled 6.5 (Berry, 133). Berry used footage she had taken as documentation, to later make artwork, just as I and thousands of others have done. This phenomenon is becoming more common. Where once a film crew with expensive, high quality cameras

and special audio equipment were needed to shoot movies, now the everyday person can instead. Because of this, video artwork can be created without the final product being the initial goal. People can just film things in their lives, archive them for documentation purposes, and then return to them with new and refreshed eyes for later uses. This phenomenon has been noticed by traditional movie making circles, as now there is an entire movie subcategory called method filmmaking which aims to make professionally filmed movies look “homemade”, the *Blair Witch Project* being just one example (Scott, 2001).

Now that smartphones are an item nearly everyone owns, and they all have a camera which are capable of recording, people who might not otherwise get an opportunity to share their thoughts or ideas now can. On our maker day page for the mobile media video project, we saw a nurse demonstrate the way germs can spread even with the use of gloves (ABC, 2020). This is a demonstration we likely would not see if it were not for the popularization of phone recording. The video is an easy to understand and simple concept which the nurse was able to demonstrate to viewers without fancy production or high-cost cameras. The same can be said for my comparison of bugs and humans. I don't think most people would make that connection, and now I can share it (though it is admittedly less useful than the nurse's video).

We are Bugs is closer to the trailer for *9 Lives* we watched for our maker day (Cherry, 2017). The trailer was the first feature film to be shot on iPhone 6s in 4k resolution. So while all of the videos were filmed with the intention of making a movie, they were made using a medium almost everyone has access to. This movie is a great example of work that aims to create a quality product using accessible materials.

However, unlike the *Blair Witch Project*, *9 Lives* wants to come across as a professional, high quality product that does not feel “homemade”, despite being made on a smartphone camera. This relates to my project because, just like *9 Lives*, *We are Bugs* is filmed using only phone cameras. Despite this, the quality is perfectly good, the audio easily understood, and even the editing (save for a few parts) all done on a cellular device. The ability to create high quality, engaging, and entertaining media with items most people own has huge implications for future media-creation, and the accessibility of the fame and fortune that accompanies entertainment. We can see these effects playing out in the form of YouTubers, who are everyday individuals who manage to create a fanbase and platform using their iPhones.

While I am proud of *We are Bugs* as it is now, I can think of ways to better it that I do not yet know how to do. For instance, I would love to add a feature where users can click on the bug being shown and a blurb about where the bug was filmed, when, by who, and why would pop up. I’d also love it if the blurb had a short paragraph about what kind of bug is being shown, and a little bit of information on what the bug might have been up to based on the season the clip was filmed in. If it had these additions, I think the note about how viewers do not know these clips were not filmed with the intention to exist together, would be more apparent. This change would create *We are Bugs* into something more interactive for viewers, much like the interactive documentaries Kate Nash writes about in her article, “What is interactivity for?” Nash writes that as the way viewers watch documentaries change, the format and interactivity level of documentaries also have to evolve. I think this is a very good point, and so if I were to continue working on *We are Bugs* I would like to make these interactive

changes, as a method of connecting the viewer to the mobility of the filmed pieces, and to offer a form of interactivity in order to engage viewership even more.

Conclusion

We are Bugs is a video project made by using mobile phone cameras, edited on a phone app, and made with video clips which were not originally filmed to be all together. The project encourages viewers to see similarities between themselves and the bugs being shown on screen, not in a demeaning or disrespectful way, but in a harmonious and connected way. It is an example of a poetic art-video made with footage taken as documentation rather than art. The fact that the clips filmed were not meant to be related to one another creates a great deal of diversity in color pallet, location, and topography, creating a multi-dimensionality for viewers. The poem being read is meant to connect the similarities between humans and bugs more closely to viewers. The mobility elements of this project have to do not only with the topic (bugs and humans) but also with the method of creation (over a long period of time, without intention of connecting them together). By making this project about mobility as well as with mobility, the project takes on a deeper meaning which is not immediately apparent to viewers without further explanation, which ultimately creates a more dynamic project. *We are Bugs* works to convince viewers that, just like bugs, they have the constant and invisible force of nature guiding them in their lives.

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