

izv. prof. dr. sc. Sanja Bojanić
Diplomski studij Vizualne komunikacije i grafički dizajn
Kolegij Znanost, tehnologija i kultura

RISEBA Audiovisual Media Arts
Student Aleksandra Reisenere
Erasmus Mobility Exchange program

Concept of Art, Life and Death

During the course “Science, Technology and Culture” with professor Sanja Bojanić, we contemplated topics such as death, what happens to soul and body after this occurrence, meaning afterlife and the interaction between overcoming someone’s death and technologies in the present day. We also discussed the importance of artists challenging the audience with their concepts in current affairs. Our main task was to express our thoughts on these themes in a storyboard.

In this paper I am going to present my view on everything that we have learned, starting from the beginning of constructing idea overall and specifically on this project. Then I explain my viewpoint on the course from life to death and how we may affect it with our decision making and the ways we might improve the outcome of our challenges. Continuing with my reflection on reincarnation philosophy and concluding my thought process based on the inspiration of an episode in TV Show “Black Mirror”. In the end of this paper I unfold the process of putting my ideas into visualisation and propose further realisation for this project. Every art form has a concept. A statement to whom artists themselves believe or, if not, they raise a question not only to themselves, but towards the audience through their artistry. Hence art is an interest-based structure, which is why it is significant to portray relevant and awareness building topics. In current days it is remarkably easy to reach the listener, but even more effortless to lose their attention. This is where the manipulation and provocation come into the scene, not necessarily in a malicious and intentional way though. It serves a considerable part in the progress of the viewers perception, because artwork has the potential to challenge ones thought process. Keeping this in mind, while working on this project, I wanted not only to express my angle, but also to raise an awareness on consequences of our own decisions through life and the possible affect on afterlife. As for the process of turning a simple idea into an accomplished concept, this particular project was quite challenging. My usual style of work consists of showcasing my own already made conclusions, rather than raising a question for myself during the production phase. However, the afterlife theme is an unknown ground and with my art I can only interpret my view on it and cause the viewer to make their own interpretation. The similarity with my previous works though is the search for patterns of surrounding events. In this case how our lifestyle with habit repetition influences the course towards death. The question I raise here is - if it affects the afterlife as well. Everything we are doing reflects in the universe, considering the fact that we affect every single sell with our movement and choices. And as everything is connected, I believe that also our afterlife is connected. This is the reason why I chose reincarnation as the representation of my initial concept. As I mentioned before, each path we are choosing to partake is influencing everything around us. Naturally everything around us and all the situations we are introduced with make an impact on us the same way. No matter the circumstances, I believe, that even in the most cornered situation, where it seems like you are left with only one solution,

there is another exit. Whether it would be more convenient or not is a different matter. With that being said, I believe that we make our decisions based on what we know, sometimes making premature decisions, without contemplating other possibilities nor thinking out of the box and perhaps even unintentionally choosing the decision in our usual comfort zone, disregarding the choice that would be rather difficult, though effective. When making choices naturally we are prioritising what would be best for us. What is going to be best for our ego. And at times it is hard to understand and analyse things what would be best for us in the long-term.

Certainly, it is equally substantial not to focus only on the far future with a responsible behaviour, but also live in the moment. It is all about the balance. Especially nowadays with this growing marketing structure to attract more and more customers. To catch the unfulfilled human's eye and promise them a way to feel better. Especially with the growing culture of the saying - you only live once. Every time while making a decision and pondering on this phrase, there is quite a bit of probability to fall in the trap of your own short-term wish. These long- and short-term wishes are linked to the human never-ending search for happiness and fulfilment. You could categorise it in two different ways - one is the short-term happiness and the other is long term happiness. Unfortunately, if you are achieving only one of the two, it is a recipe for quite an opposite result. If we cannot see through the hardships of the big picture and choose to patch our wounds with temporary solutions, we are drowning more and more into inescapable sorrow. I believe that these judgements are first steps towards inevitable addictions, although I have a hope for our will and that we are strong enough to fight everything that comes our way. Regardless of the significance of a hope and belief, there are more concrete ways how to maintain this balance and get back on the track if we turn the steering wheel in the wrong direction. Humans are adaptive creatures and we could go into the comfort zone as far as turning ourselves blind to the obvious problems. In this case, there is a massive change, that needs to be had. In order to go out of a stagnating phase or even worse a regression, there has to be a turning point. The most effective way to achieve this, in my opinion, is to have a certain kind of discomfort. Living out of a comfort zone sharpens ones thought along with starting to think out of the box. That is also what Franz Kafka was deliberating in his novel "A Hunger Artist". The way we attain this mental state naturally however, is by reaching the lowest point in our lives, where we rethink our existence and the course that leads up to this stage and start changing our path to a better good. In other words, by having a balance between satisfaction and dissatisfaction we equalise the proportion of short term and long-term happiness. Nowadays there is evident increase in popularity of the minimalism movement and for a clear reason. We are surrounded with huge number of things in our environment, alongside information on social media and the variety of the mass production offers, therefore it is distracting to have a clear mindset. It is impossible to absorb everything and there is no apparent need for that.

We crave to escape this chaos for the purpose of finding ourselves, so an efficient starting point in order to find your inner self would be to remove all the unnecessary things in the physical space, that are distracting to accomplish the goals, plus narrowing information sources to only what is crucial. All this via the process of elimination. This brings us not only to a better self-understanding, but also awareness towards others and the global picture. Minimalism movement is also common in art department lately, specifically in designs. To compliment one of the many aspects of my concept, I chose to maintain the simplicity, which on top of that purifies my idea. In the religious belief of reincarnation, the ultimate goal is to escape the samsara cycle, meaning for a soul to stop the rebirth process and finally find its true self. There is a very detailed explanation in their philosophy how to achieve this. The theory described in the Tibetan Book of the Dead called "Bardo Thodol" states, that afterlife is a transition,

where you have an opportunity for liberation. Upon death there is an infinite potential light of reality, where everything is energy and we are the vessels of light and it starts with acknowledging this. That is present for us right now and we might not be aware of it, but over there it comes clearer. In the very few moments after you die, there is an opportunity for immediate liberation, where the white light in other words luminosity appears, which is your essence and, if you did not spend your time during your life to recognise yourself, you will fail to follow it and to reach your liberation. The path then continues towards peaceful deities, where you will experience random imagery of your former life - pleasant dreams projected in a light form. Furthermore, the wrathful deities phase with frightening hallucinations. These illusions are your own issues - resentments, fears, impatience - all the negative virtues you have to fully eliminate during the living period. Choosing any of the projected lights to escape another, is a direct path towards rebirth, unless you follow your own true light. This is just a small summary of a much wider and thorough philosophy, but essentially what the book teaches us is how to operate via physical life and what to expect in afterlife. (Quantum Revolution Counseling, 2017) Since afterlife is an abstract ground - referring to my previous argument - I cannot necessarily believe their description, because in my opinion, and anyone is free to disagree with it, to make a scrupulous statement, it has to be justified with solid facts. The never-ending dispute between theology and science. Although I am aiming more towards science, hypothetically nothing is real, thereby the borderline between concrete and abstract territory is obscure. Above and beyond I do respect their view and think that it is a very endearing interpretation, that has inspired many to be better human beings, which ultimately serves a higher purpose. Despite the fact, that there is no single formula how to reach the purest form of ourselves, reincarnation has this alluring quality about it. I view their belief as an art form, which with altruistic manipulation motivates human beings. Although it might seem controversial for me as a non-believer to choose this as a representative element, I appreciate their impact on greater change and portray their belief with purest intentions. Thus far I have explained my observations on the afterlife theme through the first-person perspective, in other words what happens to us in the course of life and death. Nevertheless, there is an additional manner to outlook life after death. During our lectures we watched several TV Shows that displayed afterlife from the third person perspective, meaning the grieving period. The one example that was the furthest away from a healthy mindset after a loss of someone, in fact was the one, that stimulated my reflections and connected all the reviewed themes the most.

In the TV Show "Black Mirror" episode "Be Right Back" - a woman loses her husband and with the advancement of technologies, there is an opportunity for her to get into contact with him. By him I mean an artificial intelligence replicating his personality from the information collected from social media and his devices. She could talk to this AI on messages or video chat, but the science fictional approach did not stop at the conversational level with the deceased. The storyline continues with another, more expensive offer by putting his replica into a shell, which is also a paradigm for consumers satisfying their short-term wish by not dealing with the emotional state, but turning into a denial phase. This procedure is generated with an embryo body, electrolytes and water. The symbol of energy and water as a living form was the one that resonated my thought process and put all the ideas into perspective. Electrolytes and water cells are connected to life. Humans body alone consists 72% of water and at the same time we are this energy bubble that, as previously mentioned, strikes everything around us. Everything flows - energy flows, water flows and equally we need to flow. We need to go with the flow and trust ourselves, because if we listen to our inner selves, we are the only ones, who will have all the answers. Be patient, take care of our mind and body, surroundings and others. Care for

nature and letting go of the past, because everything will come to an end, constructing another beautiful life in its place. All the conclusions I reached during this course led me to a finer existential understanding. The storyboard I made for the main task of the course was before all the theoretical information though. Regardless of this, what is amusing is that the undeveloped thoughts on these topics were intuitively similar, as the artwork compliments my conclusions achieved after the design was made. In the beginning, when I had the first thought of combining life choices and afterlife, I started with a sketch and tried to find the most efficient way of showcasing the reasons of deaths (in the balloons). Though the causes might seem cliché, unfortunately they still are relevant to this day and therefore important to bring to light. On the other hand, what I wanted to put into interpretation is whether they did it to themselves through life choices or not. With that being said, the little girl has a pink thread at her feet and she is blowing the balloon herself, so she is making her own decisions. I was not necessarily portraying suicidal theme, but that there is a coherence in every aspect of decision making. Furthermore, the symbol behind the thread is also opening different interpretations. I chose not to indicate, whether she herself is the one who will put it around her neck or is there another force that is going to tie it. Here comes in the picture destiny - another thing, besides afterlife, that is unexplainable. Though previously I unfolded my belief in decision making and that we are the ones, who can change the course of our lives, nevertheless there are phenomena that are happening around us to whom humans add another layer. Even the most cynical people have contemplated the idea of fate, of something more powerful than us. We all can feel other forces affecting us. Some more, some less and some might put more meaning to it than others. Behind the scenes there is this constant argument with rational state of mind and our feelings. All this, because we live with a hope. Hope in my opinion is the basis of every religion, every belief and every god. When putting my philosophical observations from sketch into the design, the question appeared of how I want to visualise people themselves. My plan was to characterise them according to the theme in balloons, but at the same time I did not want to put a huge emphasis on their appearance. What is important for me, whenever I am making a concept of art, is to look into the big picture. The details are the ones, which provoke a thought and enrich the idea behind it, but the wholesome vision helps the viewer understand the meaning and for the artist to execute their goal. For this reason, I decided to make the characters only with silhouettes, moreover, to make them transparent as the focus switches from them to the background, therefore the sky for the past and ground for the living. Continuing with the execution, there is a great base for turning it into an animation. How so? Well I would not say this design is categorised in futurism genre, but there is definitely potential for movement. People, balloons, the girl blowing one, as well as the clouds. Moreover, there is a story line with focus point going from the left side, following the arms, passing the balloons, till the eye meets the little girl. According to this, there is a potential for structural dramaturgy as well. Despite the obvious story line though, I would not make the playwright the same way. I would use a circle story line, where it begins with the little girl and also ends with her.

This arrangement would symbolise a samsara cycle and at the same time I believe it would complement my concept with making spectator curious of what is about to happen, giving more and more questions during the whole animation. Elaborating on my proposal for an animation with a circle structure-based plot, I will describe a detailed timeline. In the beginning a girl would blow a pink balloon. Inside the balloon she sees a growing little heart, that has a crack in the middle. There would be a close up of her reaction to it and in the eyes, there would be a reflection of the balloon. The picture zooms in the eye where the balloon is, but this time it is with syringes while floating in the air. Camera movement goes lower to meet the eyes of the character behind the girl. The thread around her neck is connected to a

stranger's hand on her shoulder and the movement would continue towards the next person. The next person would breath heavily and the thread would be tighter around her neck. After that, the shot continues towards the army man. Camera would zoom out and show these characters floating in the sky, but the girl would not be in the picture. When camera zooms back in towards the first skinny character, who is behind the girl, there would be a close up showcasing their hand reaching forwards. The hand stops on the top of the girl's head, who at the time is still looking at the balloon. The little girl would be so occupied with the broken heart inside the balloon, that she would not notice the hand on her head. She would look at the ground and see a pink thread. Then she would take a hairpin out of her hair and make it into a needle. She would then burst the balloon and patch up the heart.

Consequently, during the course "Science, Technology and Culture" I have not only learned of the significance of the artistic concept realisation and the importance of artists reflecting relevant topics, but also arranged the abstract afterlife theme in more structural way than before. As regards to the artworks, judging both of them - the design and the animation - it is effortless to spot the divergence between the two and for a clear reason. All the theoretical studies on afterlife has deepened my perception on the meaning of life and although the two works are similar in their essence, there is a noticeable progress, meaning the change of the animations ending. The reason I chose to change the closing component in that particular way, where the little girl takes an action and saves the heart inside of the balloon, is because I intended to showcase the significance of the self-awareness by clearing your mind and finding your inner self.

This course happened during Erasmus Exchange program in Academy of Applied Arts, University of Rijeka.

References Quantum Revolution Counseling, 2017. "New Eyes" on the Tibetan Book of the Dead: What Happens After You Die? (video). Site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBI5v2WGqrI6>