GRAAPHS: graphic representations of abstract and altruistic phenomenological hymns and stories

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Soli Deo gloria.
Should nothing of our efforts stand
   No legacy survive
Unless the Lord does raise the house
   In vain its builders strive
To you who boast tomorrow's gain
   Tell me what is your life
A mist that vanishes at dawn
   All glory be to Christ!
All glory be to Christ our king!
   All glory be to Christ!
His rule and reign will ever sing
   All glory be to Christ!
   His will be done
   His kingdom come
On earth as is above
Who is Himself our daily bread
Praise Him the Lord of love
   Let living water satisfy
The thirsty without price
We'll take a cup of kindness yet
   All glory be to Christ!
All glory be to Christ our king!
   All glory be to Christ!
His rule and reign will ever sing
   All glory be to Christ!
When on the day the great I Am
   The faithful and the true
The Lamb who was for sinners slain
   Is making all things new
Behold our God shall live with us
   And be our steadfast light
And we shall ere his people be
   All glory be to Christ!
All glory be to Christ our king!
   All glory be to Christ!

Kings Kaleidoscope
All Glory Be To Christ
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for their constant and unwavering support. Not once have they discouraged me from pursuing what I am passionate about and I know that is rare. I am deeply grateful to the University of Iowa for giving me the space, time and resources to be able to conduct this research. Thank you Jeremy Swanston, Terry Conrad and T.J. Dedeaux Norris for your patience, critical inquiry, encouraging discussions and making me uncomfortable so as to propel me forward. Thank you David Livingston and Mark Arant for valuing the creative characteristics of God. Riley Vier, you mean a lot to me and I don’t say it enough. Thank you, my sweet boy. I am humbled by all of the people who regularly ask me about my work or take the time to view it and engage in discussion with me about it. Thank you friends and family alike. Thank you Carley Cullen, Josh Brdicko, Melissa Airy and Nina Kintsurashvili. Having good people with you in the trenches is underappreciated. I would also like to thank all of the printmaking graduate students and professors. Thank you for welcoming me in with open arms and treating me like family.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

While the dissection of experiences may begin in an ironic, satirical or even absurd place, it never ends there. What starts in potential insincerity always lands in genuineness. The natural human response to postmodern nihilism is metamodern earnestness. This superficial heightened sense of awareness reveals tension between humor and calamity, between marionette and autonomy. It tells of the struggle between progress and apathy, forward movement and stagnation, a heart that is still beating and one that has stopped. The human desire to belong and have purpose cannot be suppressed any longer than one is willing to deny one’s own existence.

Physical and spiritual identity is an interconnected process to which there is but one end. While the process, production and documentation of physical and digital media invites one to look at, it does not always invoke one to look through. A creation points beyond itself to its creator, transforming the gaze from immediate to infinite. By manipulating and combining printed and digital media, the visual language of vulnerability, humility and spirituality is transformed to uncover its psychological, cultural and emotional underpinnings. Through the process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, the obscure, otherwise overlooked details that make up the whole are highlighted. This iterative process serves as a platform to reveal the intimate and deliberate possibilities in traditionally superficial and irreverent avenues of repetitive communication.
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PREFACE

This work is derived from a desire to know my place in the world, who I am and where I am going. Donald Robson, Professor of Art at Concordia University, Nebraska, told me, “Every mark you make is a self-portrait,” and that idea has really lodged itself into my rib cage right over my heart. I desire to be honest with myself and also communicate to those around me my humanity and depravity. I am merely one speck of space dust in the infinite cosmos and only one drop of water in the endless ocean. But I know who set the stars in motion and who controls the currents and riptides in the ocean, and he cares about me deeply.

In this work I am confronting my mortality, identity, purpose, ethics, worldview and paradoxical desires in an effort to be more vulnerable with others and myself. I like to know the answers to questions, but I also like to wonder and think of all the possibilities. For example, I purposely avoid information about clouds because they fascinate me and I’m not done thinking about them yet. I don’t want to know how they’re formed, where they come from or why they all seem to hang at the same level because there are moments where I look up and am in awe of them. I am no longer a child but I want to hold onto my childlike imagination as long as I can.

My desire is for this work to cause even one person on this planet to stop and think deeply about their physical, emotional and spiritual identity for only a moment. Here is my heart and my hand, will you provide yours?
ONE

Not only is postmodern nihilism an ineffective and unrealistic way of living in and interacting with the world; it’s irresponsible. The complete denial of meaning and purpose in life snuffs out the very essence of human existence and robs the soul of the spiritual milk it so desperately screams for. The postmodern society accepts truth the way a revolving door accepts people who are late for work. The only absolute is there are no absolutes and relativism reigns supreme. Emotions, passions, memories and desires are more than just chemical reactions in the brain and hold emotional weight in the heart of even the staunchest nihilist.
The natural human response to postmodernism is metamodernism. Postmodernism provides a worldview that is bleak, unresponsive, devoid of meaning and bursting at the seams with accidents and chance encounters. It is the bloated corpse haphazardly buried in the backyard that the overzealous dog’s paw will soon dig into. Postmodern ideals have permeated society in such a way that it hides in plain sight. Nihilistic cultural icons are wolves in sheep’s clothing providing humor at the expense of others while attacking all things considered sacred. If this culture permeation is not understood or recognized, the average consumer will not notice the nihilistic worldview they have unconsciously adopted. There is nothing that cannot be dashed against the rocks for the postmodern thinker. Sacred objects, ideas and beliefs make an easy first target because of their importance in the hearts and minds of others. Whether nostalgic, financial, religious or sentimental, the importance associated with a sacred thing is based upon different beliefs or ideas. But because all absolutes, ideologies and traditional ways of interpreting and understanding the world have been thrown out the window by most, those are the things which must first be debunked for the few.
The response to this worldview is naturally a satirical and self-deprecating defense mechanism that creates even more emotional and spiritual division between the self and reality. When actual purpose is encountered, the nihilistic soul is propelled out of the postmodern stratosphere and into the metamodern infinite space beyond. But this rocket was assembled in the depths of depravity and knows nothing besides insincerity and irreverence for its immediate surroundings. The result in encountering this new atmosphere is the inverse bell curve line rocketing back up towards a modernist perspective. Although the surface of the rocket remains calloused, bruised and scarred, it is now only a thin facade. Actual structural integrity vibrates with anticipation right beneath the epidermis. A purpose is discovered and the soul’s seemingly insatiable thirst is quenched. The resulting worldview is one of contrast and tension that at times shoots itself in the foot.
Metamodernism is a ball of genuine sincerity dipped in a vat of irony and sarcasm and set in the sun to dry. It is descriptive, not prescriptive. Metamodernism describes reality. It does not attempt to provide or point to a new one. It is the moment the 3D glasses slip down to reveal the optical trick being played to produce the dimensional effect. The pixels are still on the screen, the actors are still giving their lines, but the veil has been torn if only for a moment. Since the visual joke can be recognized and appreciated, the sincerity of the movie can be consumed in a new light and with new joy. The metamodernist does not see life through rose-tinted glasses, but rather through one rose-tinted monocle and a piece of coal shoved into the other eye socket. This dual vision describes people stuck in the middle of their own unique personal identity Venn diagrams that possess both present and eternal ramifications. The concept of spirit fighting flesh is finally understood in the brain, but how that idea transitions into the heart and daily life is not yet realized. It requires a genuine look inward and an equally sincere outward response.
Visually communicating humbling experiences and mistakes can destroy the ego and confront inner struggles that have been truly formative in the production of a person. This includes acknowledging personal daily growth at the hands of others and accepting this form of immediate and eternal molding. Documenting and sharing this physical and spiritual development displays the growth in a way that invites others into the process. The invitation is one of patience and contemplation where immediate gratification doesn't necessarily exist. It is collaborative humility, not isolated humiliation. The human experience is extremely nuanced, individual and personal, yet universal. Clothes get dirty and need to be washed, space needs to be navigated, historical and contemporary injustice needs to be reconciled and dinner must be prepared. A micro space that
is inhabited in isolation can become a macro cohabited space. Tearing the
curtain between sacred personal space and shared public space produces
comradery and collaborative solutions. When experiences becomes universal,
they are no longer the snarling beast encountered deep in the snow-covered
forest, but they become the frantic ant clearly exposed under blinding spotlight.
Reflecting on and communicating daily experiences can make the glass vitrine around the human soul a little less opaque. Patient introspection can reveal situations, people and conversations that have helped shaped a person. Acknowledging and accepting that humans are formed and shaped by other humans allows humility and gratitude to enter the heart and mind of the introspective observer. Influence for human molding comes from both internal and external forces of magnitudes great and small. A lifeless leaf crushed underfoot, a high school football game winning touchdown or walking on the edge of a cliff may mean nothing to the average person, but can mean everything to someone. These moments create situational empathy with those who have had similar experiences and further crumble the pseudo robust vulnerability facade.
The intricate and twisted tango of daily life is ephemeral and disappears like the mist that vanishes at dawn. For now, it is still pitch black and the glowing eyes of potential attackers have faded away. But dawn is rapidly approaching and the earth will continue to rotate like it always has, bringing that bright burning star over the horizon. Every gasp for air and violent pump of the heart lurches the body one step closer to that inevitable dawn where all will be laid bare and exposed.
If formative experiences are reflected upon and the proper people are thanked for their contributions while they can still hear it, others can be invited into the process. A form of show and tell begins and struggles that were once thought to be unique and isolating are found out to be quite universal and equally crippling or challenging for others. This interaction requires reciprocal vulnerability, trust and humility. But now ripples of lessons learned and comradery spread out in all directions like the water in a lake responding to the boulder that is now sinking below its surface. Even though the contemporary human heart is trained to seek instant gratification, none will be found in this sacred space. Vulnerability is not viral, but physical. It is the bead of sweat on the forehead of the one asking for forgiveness and the weight of the hand of the forgiver placed knowingly on their left shoulder. It is blood mixed with tears and tired knees pressed into rain soaked concrete.
THREE

Identity is made up of physical, emotional and spiritual properties. One of these identity elements should not and cannot exist without the other two. If it is perceived that one or more of these properties does not exist or is not connected to the other two, it is merely suppressed or ignored. It is a Venn diagram of three circles all overlapping with a void in the center, anxiously waiting to be filled by the individual.

WHAT IS 'IN'?

IMAGE 15, CHAPTER 3, SPREAD 1
The true self is not defined by a nametag and cannot be fully expressed in any one context. Identity is like a fluid in that it conforms to the container in which it is placed. The self has one true reality, but there are three million selves in line behind that one that are just as true. Whatever physical, emotional or spiritual space is currently occupied determines which self is shuffled to the top. This is not to say that each space brings out a disingenuous self, but rather each space requires a truer self if knowledge of identity is desired.
FOUR

Looking at is different than looking through something. One requires eyes and the other the use of a heart and mind. Looking through pushes one beyond what merely exists in front of them to what lies beyond this temporal plane. Paint lies on a canvas but it is not just the paint that is meant to be seen. Beyond the paint lives the paintbrush, the smoke-filled studio in which it was made, the artist and the concept that forced the artist to make the piece. The artist creates because they were created. This is not to say artists are superior creations, but that they merely use a different creation language than others.
Everyone communicates in some way or another, whether it be verbally, nonverbally, written, sound, silently, physically or visually. All of these forms of communication are creations happening in real time. Shoulders slump after bad news is received and a new method of communicating is created. A clay cup intentionally made without a bottom communicates something different than a cup made with a perfect bottom. This difference in communication is heightened further if both cups are made by the same hands. Artists reflect what is intrinsic to their nature and react to an irresistible urge deep inside themselves to reach out and manipulate the world around them. They were breathed into existence and they continue that divine breath with every mark they make. It is a collaborative process that always points upward whether the human collaborator knows it or not. Art making is always a response to this initial creation; the first ever creation. Exactly what is being created is essentially irrelevant because the act of creating is in itself a direct reference to the Creator.
FIVE

While repetition has recently entered contemporary digital language by way of the loop, it is not new to the human experience. Lessons are hard learned and then forgotten, only to be learned again, resulting in the reopening of old wounds. Before the scab fully forms it will be picked off and replaced by a bigger one. Identities, histories, belief systems and personal convictions become more ephemeral than printed matter as new content is filtered through personal morality, only to be subsequently replaced. Patience is no longer a virtue and will continue to work its way from necessity to nuisance.
Humans have been, and continue to be, rhythmic and repetitive creatures. Although the exact details of what happened yesterday may differ from today, one eternal perspective step back provides a vantage point in which both days are identical. The earth turns and sleep ensues. It turns again and there is work to be done. It is only natural that the short, looping animation known as a GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) has entered and revolutionized contemporary dialog. Not only has it shaped how people talk to and interact with each other, it has further assimilated popular culture into daily life. This looped animation takes the place of actual conversation and is frequently used as a crutch for a lack of emotional vulnerability. Instead of explaining a minor anxiety, a GIF of a dog sitting in a room on fire saying, “This is fine,” is sent instead. Since this GIF is
an over dramatic response, the actual emotional tension of the situation is sidestepped by using self-deprecating humor as a defense mechanism and conversation continues as normal. But these GIFs are often more expressive and can more accurately depict emotions than the written word. Once again, the language used to communicate is changed and the visual communicators come out to play. These short animations, if looked at for long enough, begin to be reminiscent of the phenomena of staring into a campfire. The looping animations never change, but the fire changes from one moment to the next just enough to be visually captivating. The almost perfect repetition of the licking flames causes the eyes to become glazed over and sends the mind down mental paths infrequently visited.

Repetition and reiteration now serves as a magnifying glass fixed on a specific moment in time. It patiently focuses attention on formerly concealed details and brings to light what was previously left in the dark. Tension, irony and sincerity that is often overlooked in the mundane is captured and presented like a pinned insect for further consideration. This more intimate and potentially crude form of show and tell cultivates a more patient mode of seeing and introspection. The gaze must be transfixed inward before it moves outward. Socrates is quoted as saying, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” It is not only not worth living, but life becomes merely survival mixed with unexplainable guttural groans.
Self-examination requires patience, determination and potentially the promise of a reward. Most narrative stories outside the postmodern media end with, or are soaked in, morals or lessons to be learned. The advice, knowledge or information gained is the reward for experiencing the entire story and submitting to the reality that specific narrative prescribes. This sweet morsel of expertise is presented to the watcher, reader or viewer from the mind of the creator indirectly.
On a timeline, the beginning is where the idea germinates in the mind of the creator. At the end of this timeline is where the viewer interacts with the created work. In between those two points on the timeline exist infinite and unimaginable possibilities of creation, communication, manipulation, mistakes, tangents, discoveries and influence. Self-examination across this timeline requires a balance of being in the moment and reflecting on the past. Falling into either proverbial ditch eliminates the possibility of a reward. Even if the end is reached with perfect balance, the given moral or lesson must be applied. Conviction or a shift in worldview means nothing if it is not transferred from head to heart to hand. A chart of poisonous berries left at the campground is useless to the famished hiker.
Ideas are more important than the objects they are carried in and expressed through, but the object may itself possess the idea. An automotive owner’s manual has a section covering adequate and inadequate tire pressure, but will never itself be able to fill a tire to the correct pressure. An idea about tire pressure is communicated through text on a page that is bound in a book rattling around in the glove box. Once the owner of the car absorbs this information, that section of the book loses all relevance save for recollection if the pressure is forgotten. This owner’s manual has now physically manifested its internal information in the external world in the form of a quick stop at the local gas station. The information in the owner’s manual is more important than owner’s manual itself. In theory, those couple pages about tire pressure could be ripped out and used for kindling. But this owner’s manual has already become a sacred object. It was the only thing in the car when it was bought and holds a certain amount of emotional weight with the owner of the car because it is the only text reference it has to the car.
A Bible is a sacred object, but the reality that the text inside reveals is what is truly sacred. The Bible, much like the American flag, is a loaded object and symbol. Histories, ideals, morals, worldviews and wars have been altered, influenced, determined by and have been subjugated to the power these objects have been given. Scripture finds its way onto skin, tombstones, bumper stickers and signs while being quoted at weddings, rallies and churches. The Word of God transforming the life of a believer is a physical manifestation and application of the ideas printed on the pages of the book. Even though the idea is more important than the object, the idea may not have been able to be expressed without use of the object. Martin Luther’s ideas and writings concerning the Catholic Church were disseminated only because of Gutenberg’s printing press.

His writings were the wood for the fire of the Reformation, but the ability to rapidly reproduce text was the tree in the forest the wood was cut from. The evening weather is communicated through a television tuned to the news station, but the television itself has altered the interior design of the living room and all the couches are pointed at it. The weather may be important, but how someone navigates through and interacts with the personal space within their home is equally important. The information any object or material carries is affected by how the object is used, what context it is placed in and if it has been manipulated or not.
Material irony can be expressed through the comparing and contrasting of sacred and casual forms of communication. The xerox printed zine stapled together laying next to the Bible bought for $11.99 highlights the paradox of sacredness and importance laid upon certain personal or public objects. The relationship a viewer has with a certain object will determine how they interpret the sacredness of an object when it is encountered. For the viewer that has an understanding of zine culture or the history of self-publishing, the stapled together pieces of paper may hold more emotional, sentimental or nostalgic weight when compared to the average person. The consumption and mass distribution of information and ideas has historically been in the hands of the powerful. Each book at a bookstore beat out ten other books to occupy that space on the shelf.
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Expressing data visually can help a reader or viewer interpret and decipher complex information faster than trying to understand raw data. One look at a bar graph that has an upward trajectory and a viewer instantly knows that they made a good investment. But this ease in data communication can also be used to manipulate the viewer. A one-dollar profit gain every year for ten years will produce a bar graph that has a very slight upward movement. But if the graph is clipped and enhanced, it will produce a bar graph that shows a significant increase.
If the actual data is also excluded, the bar graph operates on an emotional level rather than a logical one. Data visualization also provides the viewer with an immediate false sense of knowledge. Since graphs can be digested faster than a list of numbers, the viewer can leave a graph feeling like they have a grasp on the situation although they have no concept of the data collected.
Attempting to quantify the unquantifiable is an exercise in futility but also humility. Creating a simple bar graph to try and explain deep, nuanced and convoluted theological ideas is like breaking off a piece of bark and using it to explain the whole tree. While it is truly part of the tree, in no way does it encompass or define all of that tree. The one percent cannot be used to describe the other ninety-nine. But since that piece of bark is small enough to fit in the palm of a hand, it can be more fully understood than all of the larger complex intricacies of that tree. That piece of bark can now be thrown into the river, carelessly dropped onto the forest floor or brought home and placed delicately on the mantle over the fireplace.

If respected as part of the tree or not, the tree that piece of bark was torn from is still the same tree it has always been. Removing one piece of bark might give the illusion of lordship over the tree, but one glance at the branches eighty feet above reminds the bark-remover of their true size and shape in space.
Sharing lived experiences communicates purpose and design to a world that chooses to see neither. Vulnerability is the currency of an intentional society focused on truth in identity and perception. Creating in response to personal and public events, discussions and mistakes that have been formative cultivates empathy and comradesy. Purposefully attacking and attempting to dismantle sacred objects, words, ideas and emotions plunges a knife into the heart being worn on one’s sleeve.
A reciprocal laying down of arms and acknowledgement of human smallness in the scope of the universe leads to a more universal form of empathy. The questions shamefully asked in utter darkness can now be proclaimed in confidence with the rising sun. Desire for answers to questions bigger than life itself and the need for a satisfaction this world cannot provide points beyond the ephemeral to the eternal.

Shadows are proof of light.