A BRIEF HISTORY...
INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA ART INSTALLATION:
A DISCUSSION OF PROCESS, MEDIA, CONTENT, AND RESPONSE

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

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ABSTRACT

A Brief History... is in part the residue of my search for understanding as to why things are the way they are. The research involved drawing on a wide variety of materials from many sources: sanctioned histories, unsanctioned histories, ethnographies, cultural studies; cultural criticism; mythologies; religious beliefs and practices; the behavioral sciences; philosophy; feminist, social, and art theory; the perceptions and experiences of individuals; broadcast and print media; and numerous visual archives. The work is about perceptions, belief systems, and the structuring of reality.

This written thesis discusses the making of the work from learning the technology—interactive multimedia—to translating the research into the final product including analyses of conceptual and visual elements, as well as audience interaction with the thesis installation exhibition.
For all of the people who have given their lives and energies for the holistic and respectful integration of humanity with the planet.
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INTRODUCTION

As a maker of work, it is my process that I often find most intriguing. I think these express the basic core of who I am: A person who has a need to be constructive, a need to seek knowledge and understanding, and a need to create and achieve challenging goals. At its best this is what art practice gives me.

I once wrote “Art is the only thing that holds me.” Although this may no longer be entirely true, it remains essential to my motivational force: that which keeps me moving steadily in my day to day; that which helps me make sense of the world in a manner that allows me to continue joyfully. This is not to say that the resultant art object is not pleasurable or a goal for me, but rather that it is often a surprise that I feel somewhat in awe of, when successful, and also somewhat disconnected from as in “Did I make that?”

In this regard A Brief History... has been both an old and a new experience for me. This time I know I made it. I have been breathing it for a year and a half. It has kept me motivated and moving through my day to day here in Ohio. It has humored me greatly, especially alone in front of my computer. It has also been a source of great frustration. Many a time I felt ready to give it up when either the technology or the content seemed too overwhelmingly difficult for me to master.
There were also moments in my reading when ‘it’ all sort of made sense to me, and a voice in my brain would say, “Well now, there’s no need to continue is there. Now you know why.” But my brain, being the sieve that it is, would soon forget and continue the search. And I in front of my computer would continue throwing materials together intuitively, amazed when they clicked in a way that generated the message I had been struggling to both resolve and communicate.

Working on A Brief History... has given me a great gift, an understanding and acceptance of my processes. Actually I first began to understand what my processes were about while designing the Department of Art’s web site. I had thought about the design for a long time. Then I generated the basic materials. Then I sweated over them for ten fourteen hour days, constantly throwing out and revising until it all finally started to make a coherent kind of sense that was both rich, open, and entertaining, at least to me.

My processes with A Brief History... were very similar. I thought about it a lot before I started generating the materials. I was reading most of the time. Once I started learning the technology, I also began generating the materials, but it was a slow start. Something in me was hesitant—perhaps the awkwardness of a new medium and a task I did not know if I was capable of achieving. The “In Search of Her” project I did with Robbie Shaw, Dawn Mercedes, Michelle Dickey, Traci Temple, and Melissa Steinman for the “Authoring Collaborative Multimedia” course helped me get rolling. For that piece I created about twenty-four images with text (six of which have survived in A Brief History...) and
became immersed in Macromedia Director (interactive multimedia software) with content.

Although "In Search of Her" was never resolved, it provided me with the impetus to move into A Brief History... I began generating materials. At some point I realized it was OK if the materials I was making did not make it into the project. I just needed to make lots of stuff. I needed to have resources to choose from. This is what my process is about: making and pulling together lots of stuff and then discovering relationships, making distinctions, creating narrative structures, allowing myself to be entertained, and then chucking most of it and starting over.
CONCEPTUAL PROCESSES

As with materials, so with ideas. The end product is fairly well removed from my original conception of it. It took a lot of making for that evolution to take place, even when the making was in my head. It also took giving myself the freedom to be myself in my work.

This freeing up came initially through viewing the works of filmmaker Yvonne Rainer. Her aesthetic is both stark and rich, metaphorically loaded and naked with profound comprehension, polished and sophisticatedly raw, deeply personal and speaking to many. I had never seen films that struck me as hers did. Repeated viewings gave me even more to marvel at. It would seem the more one sees of Rainer's works, the more one see in Rainer's works. Suddenly I felt a load lifted. It was OK to be raw. It was OK to be myself in my work. It was OK to use the medium of interactive multimedia in a manner that seemed right to me.

Not having many precedents to look to in this medium, I have sometimes had to remind myself of these things. I have had to look to artists approaching their media uniquely for both inspiration and confirmation. Artists like Yvonne Rainer, Laurie Anderson, and Squeak Carnwath all of whom have both the courage and the conviction to speak in uniquely distinct personal voices with a
clarity and strength that transcends the personal and transforms their medium. I remind myself of work I respond to, artists I respect and admire, and I am reminded of the strength and purity of my own intuition, the intuition that is available to most folks if they are able to listen and respond.

Image 1. Water images from *A Brief History*...

**Interface**

The ocean interface was the first element to be resolved conceptually and one of the last elements to be resolved visually. I knew I wanted the water metaphor throughout the work. Water speaks of life and life processes:
sexuality, nourishment, renewal, substance, cleansing. Our planet is richly
gifted with water. Our bodies cannot continue without it. It is the life force.

The oceans are the largest bodies of water on this planet. They are also
rhythmically linked to the moon and her cycles, as is a woman's body.

On a personal level I am deeply connected to the Pacific coastal waters. As
a child, my mother taught me to go to the ocean for solace. Through
demonstration she showed me that if I took off my shoes and mingled with the
sand and water, I would be calmed. Everything would be OK, or at least
handleable. Going to be with the ocean remains a vital part of my life practice.

Using text as a mode for interactivity seemed most effective as a means to
comment on language and categorization and how both are integral to our
culture. As a life long reader, it also made perfect sense. The majority of my
content comes from my readings, and I have used words to organize and make
sense of my materials. Additionally, much of my previous work incorporates text
as a visual element with subliminal personal content or messages. Since this is
becoming increasingly common in many contemporary art works, I have felt the
need to let it go in my own work. This is tough, especially when working in
traditional media, for the act of writing becomes the act of resolving. Somehow,
the use of single words repeating on an ocean wave satisfied my need for
inscribing repetitively on the surface of my object. For the most part I was able to
refrain from using textual texture in my images.
Image 2. Screen shot of ocean interface. The ocean is a full screen video of a looping wave. The words come in on the surf. The user clicks on the word to access the category.

Structure

The work contains four distinct structures each developed under a category of human existence. The categories: "Mind," "Body," "Time," and "Place" are used in part as a device for interactivity and organization and in part as a comment on society's penchant for categorization and fragmentation of the individual. Behind the categorization and structures, the work intends to demonstrate that women are not a tangle of easily compartmentalized, disintegrated parts, but rather individual, integral wholes.
Form

The work was first conceived as primarily an educational piece that would be distributed to high schools and colleges. The intent was in part a response to the backlash against feminism and women's rights which is evidenced in many young women's absence of awareness of the struggle to achieve present status; their disdain for feminists and feminist thought; and the consequences this absence and understanding of history could have on future generations. It was meant to be largely collaborative.

At this time the work is the residue of my research. It is not meant to be educational, although it is hoped that it is provocative. Beauty and seduction have become integral to the means of capturing the audience. My focus is increasingly on using this medium to make art rather than commercial/educational products.

There came a point in the making of the work where I felt really stuck. This was particularly true in "Body" and "Time." I realized the reason I felt stuck was because I did not want to do what I had set out to do. I did not want to regurgitate the historical record, sanctioned or unsanctioned. I found particularly difficult the tasks of presenting information objectively, and objectivity was crucial to my overall goal.

I have observed repeatedly the difficulty people have in hearing information they do not want to hear: information which goes against the grain of both their thinking and individual experience of reality. Thus it would not serve my
objective to preach or present information in a manner which could be interpreted as propaganda.

As one who has developed a passion for raw truth (at least to a degree), developing a sensitivity to what could be considered propaganda and preaching has been a major aspect of my growth in the creation of this work. The most poignant example of this is when visiting artist Sydney Licht responding very strongly to my critical examination of the three “Marys.” I was quite stunned by her reaction that I was preaching. At the same time I respected her desire to not have to hear my perspective. I installed a warning screen which stated that criticism of sacred Christian icons was ahead and allowed the user to retreat to safer material. Many months deeper into the making of the work, I tossed out “Three Marys,” not because I too saw it as preaching, but in part because it was not working aesthetically with the whole and in part because its overall tone was too intensely stated through my own individual voice.

Later, when I was choosing text to be narrated with the bound feet segment, I encountered preaching again. I had several sections of text to choose from. One was a short story published in 1918 called “Suh-Ho in Praise of Foottbinding” by Alvin Johnson. This was written about the time when intercontinental travel was becoming more widespread, and thus the practice of footbinding was brought to the attention of western peoples. The text was actually meant to be subversive (a critical examination of the entire collection of stories implies that Johnson was somewhat of a feminist for his time). Ying Yin agreed to narrate for me. I should mention here that other text options I gave her included some Chinese
erotica focused on the bound foot as sexual fetish. I allowed Ying to choose the text she would narrate. When I applied the narration to the image sequence, it very strongly came across as preaching. It did not achieve the effect I was looking for which was information presented objectively. What I needed to internalize was that objectivity is relative and dependent on context.

By this time in the making of the work, I had already let go of literal representations of my research. This letting go was in fact what freed me to continue in the work in places I felt stuck. I began allowing myself to make things up that both entertained me and allowed me to communicate my message in a hopefully subtle manner. This includes the use of visual metaphors to communicate the essence of the content.

Only a small percentage of the material included in the work which is fictional is presented as factual. Presenting fiction as fact is the key here. Facts are often shocking in their purity. However, sometimes a slight twist here or there can turn a factual bit of information into a thought that stays with and provokes further investigation. In the very least, if I could provoke thought or further investigation the work would be successful in my mind.
Are men obsolete?

Two Eggs Make a Baby!

We’ve all thought about it, if not dreamed about it. “It” being the possibility of creating a baby out of two eggs—none of that other stuff involved. Rumors have been floating around for aeons about the possibility, but lack of research was often blamed on the lack of sufficient “need” (as in men would no longer be sufficiently needed).

After last year’s Economist article “The Male Dodo: Are Men Really Necessary” a team of international female scientists created a synthetic compound which successfully replicates the extra-embryonic structures needed for human egg fertilization.

The first two egg baby is due to be born to a Columbus, Ohio woman this fall. With healthy egg-egg pregnancies on the rise, and the fervent demand for same sex parenthood, an increase in women only birthings are expected worldwide.

Image 3. Example of fiction being presented as fact. This story was taken from a local news article.
TECHNICAL PROCESSES

Learning and dealing with technology

When I first approached Wayne Carlson with my desire to work in interactive multimedia, he gave me the task of learning as many different software packages as possible in a quarter's time. The goal was to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each program with the intent of choosing the program which would most effectively meet the needs of my project. The options I explored were: HTML, Apple Media Tools, Oracle Media Objects, Authorware, and Macromedia Director. I did the tutorials for each of these, where available.

Tutorials can be very effective learning tools. Their shortcoming in my experience is that they rarely give the user the specific situational experiences they will require in using the software. For some folks this means that very little from the tutorial will stay with them. They do provide a very good introduction to the particulars of the software, however, and in my case they gave me enough of a feel to narrow my focus between Authorware and Director.

I input my content into both Authorware and Director to get a more realistic understanding of how the software would handle my particular needs. At that time, my second quarter, the only content I had developed centered around the Inquisition and Joan of Arc. I created very rough sequences of torture chambers,
images of Joan, and images of beliefs of witchcraft. Most of the images where appropriated reproductions of relief prints from the Middle Ages. I did my first video capture at this time. The video was a clip from Donna Read's film "The Burning Times."

The sequences in both Authorware and Director were very rough and more than a bit embarrassing in their elementary nature. They did provide me with the information I needed to make a software decision. I chose Director over Authorware for two main reasons. Director's film metaphor made perfect working sense to me over Authorware's iconed boxes connected by a maze of directional lines. I also liked that Director has its own programming language, Lingo, which can be supplemented or overwritten in C, not that I had then or have now those capabilities. It just seemed more fluid to me then selecting x's and radio buttons in Authorware's dialog boxes which appeared to have options available and prioritized in a manner that would be completely superfluous to my needs. Lingo also made Director appear more powerful and versatile than any of the other software options. Although, I do not really know if this is an accurate assessment. Additionally, Director has the ability to do frame by frame animation, which intrigued me technically even though I really did not know what I would do with it.

Interactive multimedia: Macromedia Director

When I first began importing material into Director, it was somewhat linear and generally involved an image or sequence of images which included some sort of descriptive text. It functioned as a sort of slide show that was not interactive beyond an initial choice.
As the work progressed, I began pulling out more and more of the text, finding not only the typefaces to be unsatisfactory, but also that the reading requirement was too demanding on the viewer. Emphasis on reading is not what this medium is about. It is difficult to read from a computer monitor. The text needs to be specifically poignant to capture and hold an audience. I began letting go of text and creating sound files which narrated what the text would have said. At this time I became interested in using sound as a rollover which would help indicate that interactivity could take place. I first used the sound rollovers in “Time” to give an aural clue of where the murky stream image could go.

The most delightful aspects of working in Director are the surprises I have received by layering images in the score. I began doing this to create smooth and subtle transitions. Oftentimes, it is the layered image I find most interesting. Some of these effects I could not have achieved in Photoshop had I thought to create them in the first place.

Image 4. Sequence from “Mind” demonstrates both layering of images in Director and transition of images.
Imagemaking

I have been making images on the Macintosh since 1991. My process involves both photo manipulation and digital painting, primarily in Adobe Photoshop and Fractal Design Painter (the precursor, at that time, was Electronic Arts Studio 32).

Whereas my original aspirations in digital imagemaking included being able to paint on the computer in a manner that was stylistically my own, I consistently find myself scanning in objects and images (both my own and those appropriated from various sources) and manipulating them in a manner which speaks to me.

I am not sure if I have developed my own style digitally as far as still images are concerned. That really has not been my focus. However, I have become aware of a distinct difference in the way I look at digitally created images and in my editing aesthetic of photographs used for “Place,” from the first set of scans to the later ones. Upon realizing this, I have returned to several images to change the cropping composition. This has usually resulted in a more focused concentration of the central subject, the woman in the photo.

Regarding digital images, I prefer to not see the processes at all, specifically when they involve filters. If a filter is obvious to me, its name gets in my head, and I am no longer able to see the image clearly.

At the beginning of the project, I made a great number of images, often with a vague idea of how they would be used. Many of these images never made it into Director at all. Many were placed in the project only to be removed later.
While the project was young, I think I felt a responsibility to be making images, even when it did not interest me all that much. Later I became free enough to feel good about making distinctions and finding relationships. Making images is now usually the result of a specific need for the project. I am increasingly more interested in the relationships between images than in single images themselves.

**Sound**

Sound files for the project were first created on the MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) in the Emerging Technology Studio (ETS). I used a microphone to record my voice and then manipulated it via the MIDI. This usually meant altering the pitch and applying either a flanger or echo type filter to get the desired result.

As I became more aware of Adobe Premiere’s and Sound Edit 16’s sound editing capabilities, I began to use them exclusively for both capture and manipulation tasks.

The stories in place and most of the radio sound bites were digitized from tape. Susan Chess was the musician who created and performed all of the music used in “Mind” and some of the music used in “Time.” Most of Chess’s music was digitized straight from the ETS synthesizer into Premiere.

**Video**

Before coming to OSU I made a handful of videos. Most of the clips in *A Brief History...* are taken from the last of those which was a montage I created for a dance performance titled “Obsession” by Constance Wise. These clips were all
lifted during a four hour Saturday session of channel jumping. I digitized from a final edited version of the work. When I finally located the original rushes and digitized off of it, I found very little difference as far as image quality was concerned. This puzzles me. I would expect a first generation capture to be much cleaner than a third generation capture, but perhaps it is something about the digitization process or the cinepak compression that is responsible for this flattening out of image quality.

The video clips of water were filmed at Half Moon Bay, California, in Columbus and at Hockings Hills, Ohio.
A Brief History... is in part the residue of my search for understanding as to why things are the way they are. My research involved drawing on a wide variety of materials from many sources: sanctioned histories, unsanctioned histories, ethnographies, cultural studies; cultural criticism; mythologies; religious beliefs and practices; the behavioral sciences; philosophy; feminist, social, and art theory; the perceptions and experiences of individuals; broadcast and print media; and numerous visual archives. The work is about perceptions, belief systems, and the structuring of reality.

"Mind" is an exploration in female spirituality and intellect. Images of great expanses of land and water express the deep spiritual connection of pre-patriarchal peoples to the earth. This reverence for the earth is evidenced still in religious beliefs and practices of Native Peoples from the Americas and are re-emerging in contemporary Pagan practices.

In these belief systems, humans are not separated from the earth but rather are a part of the earth. There is a deep respect for all life forms and an emphasis on care for and celebration of this union. Life is understood as a cyclical phenomena which is neither feared nor tampered with.
Image 5. Female figure appropriated from Yves Klein and used in “Mind.”

The use of the representation of the female figure emphasizes this reverence for life. There are three distinct female figures. The first one viewed is an altered appropriation of Yves Klein’s body prints of males and females. (The newspaper image I appropriated from claimed them to be male and female. They all looked female to me, and my previous knowledge of Klein’s work does not include male body prints. Do I believe it because it was in the newspaper?) I layered the male and female prints in part to give them richness and depth, in part to speak of the similarities of males and females, and in part as a comment on contemporary issues regarding art and media uses of the female figure.
Contemporary use of female imagery very largely speaks of sex and sales. Ancient uses of female imagery very largely spoke of reverence for females and life processes. I find the Klein images to both reference the reverence of ancient cultures and to be exploitative of the female figure. Additionally, he does not credit the models whose bodies made the prints. This appears to be typical of Western art practice. (But that is another thesis altogether.) I wanted to take back some of what has been, in my mind, exploited. I have covered Klein's images in red ochre. This act, common in ancient civilizations' burial practices, is supposed to mimic the blood covering of birth, returning the body whence it came.

Image 6. The “Woman of Malta” is animated to dance on an ocean landscape.

The remaining female figures are the “Stone Venus” and the “Woman of Malta.” Both speak of the immense span of time of reverence for and worship of females.

The use of sequencing in threes originally began in “Mind.” Three specifically references the original feminine trinity: Maiden, Mother, Crone. This
is symbolized as well by the triangle, which is also representative of the female pubic triangle.

Overall, “Mind” means to express spiritual purity in combination with intellectual complexity. I find it both calming and stimulating. It is important to note that mind does not imply an absence of body. They are completely integrated.

“Body” focuses on social commentary and criticism. My original intent here was to objectively present political issues related to the body: prostitution, pornography, violence, mutilation practices, social attitudes, and media representations. Through the making of the work, the original concept evolved to express social issues surrounding the female body by juxtaposing materials from diverse sources.

![Image 7. Images from opening sequence of “Body.”](image)

The opening sequence is an image of Hera emerging from her bath. The toilet flushes. Next a sequence of images: uterus, hand print, vesica piscis vertical, vesica piscis horizontal (also known as the Mandorla or Almond—the
pointed oval of the yoni used in oriental art to signify the divine female genital) plays against a sound track about plastic surgery and beauty queens.

From here the pattern of sequences of three begins. The first sequence is the red, blue and yellow hands. The hand functions on three levels. First, it acts as a stop. Second, it speaks of physicality and making. Third, the use of primary colors is meant to be a statement about art, both positive and negative.

The primary colors are pushed to earthiness in their character, thus signifying the primal instinct for making found in human animals. They also serve to indicate the Modernist era of elitism and male domination in the western sanctioned art world. In Modernist art, the primary colors can be seen to represent reductionist attitudes and the concept of purity. Specific artists using the primaries in this manner are Piet Mondrian and Sam Francis.

The red and blue hands each take the audience through a different pathway, three loops of three. The yellow hand results in multiple options, depending on which of six heads is selected at the end of the sequence. Two heads take the blue route. Two heads take the red route. One head brings on a video of a young gymnast who repeats an incredible floor routine until relieved by the mouse. One head returns to the ocean interface. The audience knows none of this except for the exit to the ocean interface which is indicated by the waterdrop cursor and the aural clue ‘control.’
The six remaining loops are made of images of object names for women. They are all photographs (except for the battle ax) isolated and placed against a stark white background. They are meant to speak of objectification and the taking away of status of women. The object names are: bag, cherry, pussy, chick, meat, ball and chain, cheesecake, bird, doll, dog or bitch, dish, tart, hen, bat, bunny, beaver, battle ax, and cow.

The information presented in “Body” comes from many sources. The sound files include radio clips, video interviews, television and film clips, and
narrations I created or recorded. The video images were all captured from television. The images are my own or are from copyright free illustration sources.

The power of this piece comes from the juxtaposition of information. Images of sassy, rail-thin models strolling the runway plays to a soundtrack on eating disorders in college age female athletes. Olive Oil is electrocuted and slammed into a piano repeatedly while a woman tells of her experience after being attacked. The procedure for different types of female genital mutilation is narrated somewhat scientifically while a red laser light illustrates the procedure on a line drawing placed against a sickly sweet pink background. Different women's voices discourse and give opinion on various aspects of societal attitudes and renderings of the female persona while images from popular culture or media play in the foreground.

"Body" has 21 main experiential options. Only four can be encountered on a pass through.

"Time" looks to mythologies and histories to retell stories relevant to women's history. Represented by a murky image of a stream with a soundtrack of trickling water, "Time" is presented as three layers of three. The cursor here is Mandorla or yoni. At the top of each stream, the water drop cursor appears with the option of 'choice.' 'Choice' takes the audience back to the ocean interface.

The first level of "Time" offers three different creation stories. They are indicated by the sound rollovers: 'first woman,' 'in the beginning,' and 'Eve.'
The second level offers three looks at mythologies before patriarchal times. The sound rollover ‘seasons’ tells the story of Demeter and Persephone. ‘Long ago’ tells a story of the Amazons. ‘I danced, they danced’ acts as a naming of and homage to the goddess across cultures.

After the brief mythological experience a pond drips red with blood. This signifies the letting of blood, the killing of woman power and the take over by patriarchy. The screen then randomly displays a quote from my reading. The quotes usually relate an insight into the thinking that would allow or justify the demise of the female.
The third layer of time looks to “Civilization.” The sound rollover ‘old ways don’t die easily’ is the entrance to medieval times: woodcut images of witches, the story of Joan of Arc, a homage to the 9 million women murdered during the Inquisition, and a quote from the Maleus Malificarum or Hammer of Witches.

'It's a different kind of time, there use to be space for such frivolity' is the entrance to Victorian times. Here, costume and custom which limited female movement and expression in society are referenced by the corset. One of three one-liners regarding Freud's writings on female sexuality is randomly displayed. These sound bites are displayed with crudely animated illustrations from Victorian times. Next, an aural reference to science and its reverberations throughout the world is heard. This is followed by a homage to Saartje Bartman, the "Venus of Hottentot." Again, a quote from my readings which relate to this time period is randomly displayed. An example is this quote from Susan Brownmiller. "On the American frontier, most sexual contact between white males and Native American and Mexican women took the form of rape."

'That meant a lot of things' is the entrance to the 20th century. This sequence begins with a clip of Anita Hill played against a radio segment from an NPR broadcast about women and minorities in sports journalism. It leads to a branch of three. The choices are: a video of lipstick from a television ad, a pro-choice button, and a tapping high heel shoe. Each of these segments juxtaposes media information/ clips from contemporary times.

The relative complexity of the 20th century section is meant to represent Postmodernism as a phenomenon as well. This is primarily achieved through the obvious use of appropriation and media sources. It would be difficult to
argue, however, that the entire work of *A Brief History*... is not indicative of postmodern influences in art, if not by the diverse elements that comprise it, than by it's focus on multiple perspectives which is integrated into both its content and experiential structure.

"Place" is a collaborative slide show which celebrates the diversity of women across time and place. My purpose here was in part to facilitate a collaborative spirit that would give a positive experience/product and be inclusive and embracing of the ways in which diverse women see women. However, I had great difficulty in getting people to respond to my call for participation, and had to resort to the OSU Photo Archives to start building the piece.

The OSU Photo Archives proved to be a wonderful resource. It was here that I began to understand what images mean to me, how they affect me, and why I am compelled to pursue their interaction.

![Image 10. "Place" images from the OSU Photo Archives.](image)

I would go into the archives, usually by appointment with Rebecca Gray. She would ask me what I would like to look at and then retreat into an off-limits sort of room filled with filing cabinets. On return, her arms would be full of dark brown manila folders, neatly labeled by both decade and university subject
category. Hours would pass as I sifted through the images. Sometimes Becky would pull out a particular one and tell me briefly what she knew of the woman, or if she was not busy with other customers, she might share in my wonder at the women before us. She was always incredibly helpful and never complained at the loads of extra filing I created for her. She also trusted me to return the images safely after scanning.

Image 11. “Place” images. Photograph contributors clockwise from top left: Ying Yin, Abhijit Varde, and Charlene Teters.

Once I got “Place” loaded up with images and was feeling a bit more secure that it could indeed happen, I began begging the folks in my day-to-day to contribute. The first large cache of non-OSU photos came from Charlene Teters. She gave me a bag full of her family photographs and trusted me to choose from them as I would. For a brief time Indigenous women from North America were at twenty percent. I continued to build the project and solicit photos by showing the work in progress. Guey-Meei Yang told me people were probably reluctant to give me their photographs because they did not know how I would use them. I guess “celebration” and “diversity” could prove to be empty words, and this I understand. Images continued to come in slowly, even up to the day before show installation time.
The soundtrack for ‘Place’ is a randomly played selection of stories of grandmothers, mothers, and childhood. All are told in the storyteller’s native language. As I am fluent only in English, it was easy for me to leave the stories unedited. Not editing the stories seemed very important to me. This part of the work is about remembering, empowerment, and giving women the right to their own individual voice. At this time there are twenty-three stories, only three of which are in English.
Regarding a digital aesthetic

From the start it has been very important to me to make work that stands with an integrity of its own: work that does not scream its processes; work that satisfies and stimulates the eye (senses), only provoking “How?” after consumption. I suspect that the type of presence I was aiming for is not an uncommon objective for many artists no matter their medium. Work that achieves this is work that most often appears in the public domain of museums, galleries, and art publications, i.e. work that is considered successful.

My concerns were specifically tied to the history (technologically focused military and market based ideologies) and, until recently, what appeared to be the intrinsic nature of digitally created art works: bright, limited palettes; metallic surfaces; cartoony animations; and an overall slickness of style and presentation. With computers increasingly in the hands of traditionally trained artists, we are beginning to see works that both challenge the original concepts of computer-based art and are acceptable in the traditional arena. However, it is important to note that the computer as art making tool continues to bear the mark of its predominantly technically focused orientation—that of programmers
and designers who make the tool from a technical perspective (what the
machine can do) and demonstrate the product of this making as computer art.

I did not want this digitally created work to be obviously digitally created. I
wanted it to be art. I wanted it to push at the boundaries of what is acceptable as
art and what is labeled as computer based art.

Why interactive multimedia for this work

Interactive multimedia was the only solution for the problem I created for
myself. Certainly the problem was created for the medium, and thus, its solution
could be argued to be dependent on the medium, but I think, more interestingly,
the medium allowed the solution to most accurately represent both my
processes, i.e. research, and an integral aspect of my belief system.

My history as a maker has literally been all over the place. I have dabbled in
many things. A Brief History... and interactive multimedia are both about the
bringing together of many things: conceptual things and media specific things.
Before coming to OSU, my making experience included: writing, painting,
printmaking, bookmaking, small scale mixed media sculpture, video, digital
imaging, and photography. A Brief History... is comprised of all of these types of
making and more.

Conceptually, A Brief History... is about many things. Certainly, it focuses on
a question of humanity. Our world being as multi-faceted as it is cannot be
resolved or whittled down via reductionist narrowing, simple or complex. All
things are related, interconnected and affect all other things. Everything we do
impacts and affects the environment in all of its forms and components. It would
not make sense for me to attempt to express the essence of my research through a suite of prints or a video collage. A poem would not do it. Nor would any object that I could create.

Core to my understanding of the world is an acceptance of a multiplicity of perspectives. I marvel at how two people can experience/interpret a seemingly same phenomena, such as a conversation or an image, in two totally different ways. We all have a unique experience of reality, and each is as valid as any other, even those that seem less mindful or enlightened. This is the strength and the beauty of the human species.

The interactive component of interactive multimedia allowed me to structure A Brief History... in a manner which would allow each person interacting with it to have an individual experience. In small ways, this is achieved through Director's random function which was sometimes used to select from a cache of music or display a visual when many options were available, but presenting only one was appropriate.

More notably, individual experience was achieved through the branching of information. “Time” has nine major experiential options. Only three can be selected on a pass through. “Body” has twenty-one major experiential options. Only four can be selected on a pass through. “Place” has more than 320 images and twenty-three randomly played stories. More than an hour of sound can be played against a half hour of images. “Mind” uses the random function to select music in several locations. It also branches in multiple locations and does not always include the option of returning to a previous point or loop.
The installation

The installation included a viewing room for *A Brief History...* and a wall space for *stills from “A Brief History...”* Both were very minimal in terms of their overall aesthetic. Gallery white was the backdrop which allowed the imagery in both cases to dominate the audience’s attention.

![Image 12. Gallery visitor interacts with *A Brief History...*](image)

The viewing room contained a 44" x 4' x 2' podium with a hole in the top. The mouse cord emerged from the hole. The mouse rested on a red mouse pad. One side of the pedestal was open and faced the screen. All of the equipment: computer, projector, and sound system were hidden inside of the pedestal. The projection screen was a 4' x 5’ piece of Rives BFK mounted on stiff foam. It was suspended from the ceiling so that its center was at the same
height as my eye level. The overall effect of the projection room was quiet, spiritual and focused. Recurring comments during the exhibition included: “It really draws you in.” and “It’s a very religious space.”

Image 13. Installation of *stills from “A Brief History…”* without image/objects.

The wall piece was made of 28 (the length of the average menstrual cycle) small shelves and 62 wooden blocks holding images from *A Brief History...*. A larger shelf for unused blocks was also included. The shelves were the same width as the blocks. The shelves came in three depths. The shallowest held only one block. The deepest resulted in a square and could hold three blocks on its surface. The varying depth of the shelves referenced the varying depth of the branches in the virtual work. The shelves protruded from a ten foot long expanse of wall. The highest shelf was not higher than my physical height. It
was important that all of the shelves be accessible to small people, specifically females. The arrangement of the shelves was meant to mimic the layering and weblike nature of the virtual work. It also referenced the snake, an early symbol of women’s power.

![Image 14. Gallery visitor interacts with stills from “A Brief History...”](image)

Both the interactive multimedia installation and the wall piece require action/interactivity from the viewer for them to be fully experienced. This references my personal perspective on life in general. Life requires action/interactivity to be fully experienced.
CONCLUSIONS

During the exhibition at Hopkins Hall Gallery, some very meaningful encounters happened for me. First was a young woman who asked me if she could write about my work for her humanities class. She needed to write a paper on religious sculpture.

The opening reception gave me an incredible amount of feedback. I was stunned to be in that little space with people focused on my work. And even more stunned that they were paying attention to and interacting with it. Most of the interaction at that time was with “Mind” and “Place,” the least controversial and the easiest parts to work on.

There was a time during the opening when “Place” ran almost all of its 32 minutes. The people in the gallery became quieter. I knew that some of them were as entranced as I become by the flow of images of women and the soft melodies of female voices telling stories in languages most of us do not understand. Several women have thanked me for “Place.” Many have expressed delight. I feel it is the strongest and most redeeming part of A Brief History... .

Sitting the gallery gave me the opportunity to observe how people interact with the work. Some navigate through quite fluidly. Some pound the mouse.
The majority of people select the first or centrally located option. They do not wait or investigate what options are available, if any. This results in much of “Body” and “Time” not being experienced. There are sections which have not been played my entire time in the gallery. There are sections which are played repeatedly. It occurs to me I could use this as a strategy to place material I wanted to prioritize. However, in making the work I tried specifically to not prioritize material, so this is a funny thing.

Most of the negative criticism regarding the work comes from people who have not experienced the work as a whole, which generally means they did not interact or they viewed it passively. The work was created so that each person could have a different experience. Both the amount of material and the structure make it very difficult for the work to be experienced in its entirety by any one person in any one session. I did this purposely. However, the work is structured so that its essence could be experienced in about twenty minutes, give or take. It really depends on the individual and how they choose to move through each area as well as how they move through the work as a whole. Yes, it does require an investment of time and interaction.

I wanted to created a work that gave more with each experience. I wanted it to be somewhat representative of life: no initial instructions, one just sort of figures it out as one goes along and eventually one gets better at it: rich and dense and loaded with complexity of meaning (both haptic and concrete); requiring action/interaction for meaningful engagement to take place; requiring mindfulness for comprehension and growth. I wanted the work to both entertain and provoke thought, to engage the senses and the mind. I wanted the work to
move beyond the commercial and educational applications interactive multimedia was created for. I wanted it to be art. I think I achieved this to an extent, however I think the depth and breadth of the art experienced is dependent on each individual person who interacts with the work. Whether or not *A Brief History...* achieves art status is relative to it’s audience and their individual abilities to engage and interact with it.

Many times while sitting the gallery, I would see people poke their heads in, have a quick look, and depart. As many people approached and left in this manner as did those who came in, approached the pedestal, and engaged physically with the work. Several people told me it was very intimidating to have to use the mouse to experience the work. One art graduate student told me she would come back when there were more people. Robbie Shaw has observed that in a group situation, some people feel responsible for the content that results if they have clicked the mouse.

I understand these things, and I do not. Mostly I see these responses to a new/different type of art experience as somewhat representative of the ways in which different people respond to new and different types of life experiences in general. Some folks go for it and experience delight in their own engagement and sense of discovery. Some folks think they know it and pass judgment with a superficial encounter. Some folks are inquisitive. Some folks are safe. Some folks experience passion. Some folks experience fear. Etcetera. Etcetera. Etcetera. Of course, it is all mixed up and uniquely individualized, as in the real world, as in the art world. It did surprise me though; I expected more engagement and interaction from my peers and art faculty. Perhaps this is a
typical response for artists who are engaged in their own work. We expect the rest of the world to be facinated by it as well.

I am continuing to process information about *A Brief History*... and the installation in Hopkins Hall Gallery. I am thinking about interactive multimedia and what it means to me as an art medium. I am thinking about its potentials. I am thinking about this medium in relation to community and the art world. I am thinking about starting from scratch and what that would mean, what I would do. It all seems very wide open. There are not yet any definitive answers.
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