INFINITE JEST 2

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Bachelor of Science of Media Arts & Studies

by
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INFINITE JEST 2
I've never read *Infinite Jest 1*. That's probably the first point to address. Unpacking what the title *INFINITE JEST 2* means in relation to that is ultimately a waste of time— not for me as an artist analyzing my own work, but for the audience consuming it. The reaction to that being the title of my thesis has largely been that of viewing it as some sort of jab at some sort of system, which is certainly a completely fair and valid reading. However, if we are meant to now pull back the curtain of “artist intent”, all that's there is just a big joke. There's no denying that I've found humor in working on a creative thesis in academia and doubling down on how up its own ass *everything* in experimental media is nowadays. It does have some “meaning” in the way every title does, but that “meaning is as a pointless name drop, a meaningless and somewhat disrespectful stunt, but I don’t mean it to throw rocks at David Foster Wallace’s opus. I very much would like to read *Infinite Jest 1*, and now that I'm taking a break from school maybe I’ll have the time. It seems interesting.

The title is the easiest place to start when breaking down an artwork, especially one that is, admittedly, named for shock value. There's a hurdle there where an audience expects a name to mean something— *anything*— relevant to the content of the work. So, before we go into everything that *does* have meaning, I want to say what doesn’t: the title. The name of the piece in itself is almost separate entirely from the actual video narrative, and the book is only concretely referenced twice directly: the opening and closing title fade to the distinct blue sky and green text of the now infamous cover. The title could be changed to anything. There's such a gravitas to the two times the title is
shown that celebrates it as some sort of stunning achievement when it flashes. **INFINITE JEST 2**. The title of this paper: *INFINITE JEST 2*. It’s completely interchangeable. In the world of *INFINITE JEST 2* branding is everything, and so the most distinguishable branding aspect of the film holds no relevance whatsoever.

At the beginning of this process I had two distinct threads stocked in my sewing kit. “Experimental media” and “anti-capitalism” were the two buzzwords past Hiatt clung to while learning thesis prep last spring. These weren’t concepts sprung from the abyss, and quickly I’d like to delve into the academic building blocks for which *INFINITE JEST 2* was built. This narrative can largely be told through the development of my tutorial projects over the last four years. While the tutorial system in media isn’t set up to be a directly cumulative process, I felt using them more as conceptual building blocks towards my final thesis project gave me a sense of direction throughout my academic career that helped prepare me for production on *INFINITE JEST 2* (available for viewing both as the final film: [https://youtu.be/t1iBihSzgL4](https://youtu.be/t1iBihSzgL4) and [https://youtu.be/k8PPxO_lo9c](https://youtu.be/k8PPxO_lo9c)).

These tutorial studies can be broadly broken down into two categories: those on non-linear or non-narrative media, largely with my thesis advisor Brian Plow, and those that are out of discipline studies in the geography department, largely on political and human geographies. While the former will be addressed when we discuss the technical aspects of the video, I’d like to discuss some of the theoretical underpinnings I picked up in my geography studies before we go much further.

A big chunk of my time studying in geography was spent learning about capitalism, specifically in the era of neo-liberalism. This is, in a broad sense, the area of

**INFINITE JEST 2**
expertise of Dr. Harold Perkins, who I worked with while first learning about these ideas in a scholarly context. Neo-liberal capitalism is the systematic structure through which the future world of *INFINITE JEST 2* can exist. The picture painted of the 2024 that awaits us is one in which then tenants of a corporation based free-market economy has expanded like a virus into every aspect of daily life. My original proposal was based around a confrontational assertion that “everything is political”, and a key goal was to show that the dominant political system in a country deeply affects all aspects of daily living. While this didn’t end up being a major stated goal nor a prime message of the final piece (focusing on convincing people everything is political has been largely replaced with creating a world in which that is more obviously true- a more satirical than confrontational approach that suited the tone of the piece better), this is a topic made present. Providing a clear understanding of what neo-liberal capitalism means to me, ’marker 1’, and *INFINITE JEST 2* is helpful before moving on to the narrative and technical aspects of the piece itself.

After studying with Dr. Perkins and again in geography with Geoff Buckley (focusing more on Appalachian poverty but, as always, capitalism rears its ugly head), I’ve synthesized what neo-liberal capitalism means to *INFINITE JEST 2*. These are, broadly, the concepts explored, with more specific details picked at more when exploring the piece’s content later.

Neo-liberal capitalism is a socio-political theory that, in America, can be traced back to the early 1980’s under President Reagan (as well as simultaneously in Britain under Margaret Thatcher). Simply put it is the political prioritization of the free-market
economy that leads to the current prevailing sense of economic Darwinism - “the strongest survive”. Despite being rooted in the 1980's, the core ideals are very much alive today, seen in “massive tax cuts for the rich, the crushing of trade unions, deregulation, privatization, outsourcing and competition in public services” (Monbiot, 2016). These tenants tend to favor corporations and businesses over the working class and it allows said institutions to enact economic policy as they see put- often leading to a profit-first, dog-eat-dog system where being a citizen takes a back seat to being a consumer. Everything is bought and sold; nothing is off limits.

This doesn’t just affect business. Ironically, much like the “trickle-down” theories associated with the system’s economics, the mindset of this inherently competitive corporatism drips down into other aspects of life. “We internalize and reproduce its creeds. The rich persuade themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit, ignoring the advantages – such as education, inheritance and class – that may have helped to secure it. The poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances”, George Monbiot writes in his excellent article “Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems”. (Monbiot, 2016). This is, while seemingly simple, is perhaps the most extreme of examples- our political system has infiltrated our psychology and brains in a way that is tangible in many human interactions.

That last part is where “everything is political” wrapped back around, but instead of trying to focus on convincing people academically it is now expressed through a world I’ve created where this is undeniably true. Capitalism and, in the case of INFINITE JEST
2’s 2024 especially, further privatization of the public sector and corporate political control are issues that go beyond what the average person would consider the political realm. These connections become more obvious when people are being body-snatched for the greater corporate interest in the world of the movie, but the hope is that this leads people to reflect on how these concepts are true of the system as a whole. No matter how dramatically the de-humanizing aspects of the system are applied, these are still exaggerations that reflect an existing reality.

The other, less-academic neo-liberal concept is the obsession with brand identity. With the advent of social media, the “humanizing” of corporations has begun with every one of your favorite fast-food places having a Twitter personality or even an intimate blog (Denny’s deserves a special circle in hell for its quirky Tumblr). A clip I’ve long loved that found its way into INFINITE JEST 2 is the Mitt Romney “corporations are people” spiel because it encapsulates all of this. He’s only really arguing that corporations are people because it’s better for the corporations. Politicians are lobbied and paid to help push corporate interest and this is pretty widely accepted. Romney’s statement just pushes things too far— in our 2024 it might go over better but it reaches a point where the intentions are so obvious that the crowd sees through it. It could pass as satire. Romney’s statement is an attempt to reinforce the neo-liberal system. However, the specificity of the comment (“human beings, my friend”) and how plain weird it is pushes that uncomfortable pod-people narrative. Everything is being privatized. Corporations are people. There’s a point where there’s not a difference in INFINITE JEST 2, and while this is rooted in an alternate reading of Romney’s speech, that people and corporations are
being Cronenberg’d into one via a bodysnatching scheme, I would argue that it isn’t an invalid reading.

That may be getting a bit ahead of myself, but it shows a solid window into how these decisions are being made with this over-arching framework in mind. With this written proposal being drafted in spring of 2017, these were the theoretical concepts rattling around my mind as I began work on what would become INFINITE JEST 2 in May of 2017. The earliest footage that would be included originally started as a separate project intended to be titled MEGA 96. MEGA 96 was to be a visual album under my artist name, marker 1, which simulated the nostalgic act of 1990’s channel surfing for a future where conventional television no longer existed. I searched web archives and video sharing sites for television clips from the mid 1990’s that struck a chord with me or represented an idea or ideal I wanted to get across. I would alter every clip, some slightly and some drastically, to show a fading of memory and an inability to fully recapture the past. Some of the videos I pulled would play long- while flipping through the air waves one might stop at a Letterman performance or an episode of The Simpsons. Coming and going through these clips was a focus but it was clearly artificial, there was an emotional connection to seeing old PBS clips but by editing the visuals you’re reminding the audience that this is not the past they remember. These things can’t truly be returned to.

The parts of MEGA 96 I was proudest of became a part of INFINITE JEST 2. This is fully integrated through the project, however: every clip in the final product is altered in some way, continuing the spirit of what was an essential part of MEGA 96. “The Feed” is
being presented to you, thrown at you. Some of it you may have seen before, but you haven’t exactly. It’s different. Better, maybe. In 2024 the feed gives you what you want.

“The Feed” is a concept that didn’t become fully realized in name until late in the process, but it is the biggest clear line from project to project. While in MEGA 96 the reasoning for clip alteration was the fade of memory, in JEST 2 it more represents a capitalistic obsession for marketing perfection. The Feed gives you exactly what you want to see: you don’t have to choose for yourself because The Feed knows you better than you. These modifications to the clips is The Feed’s way of “perfecting” these clips for you and giving you the version that’s being marketed directly to your individual needs and desires. The idea that this is at all a good thing is undermined by the Pandora’s Box of neo-liberal chaos that is unleashed when The Feed begins. This isn’t the only reading of these alterations, and in fact the cloud of nostalgia is certainly still a tangible aspect in the final project, but when it comes to expressing a critique capitalistic ideals The Feed’s failure to actually meaningfully synthesize or “improve” anything other than an argument against the future it promotes is its biggest purpose when it comes to allegory for capitalism.

Allegory and semiotic theory I’ve tried to apply to The Feed’s presentation of an uber-neo-liberal future is a topic of study from another former tutorial of mine. In spring of 2017 I worked on a tutorial researching the semiotics of representing geographic place using Appalachia as a case study. I don’t think it is s coincidence that my studying of non-literal representation and this project’s slow descent into “show, don’t tell” (media school was worth every penny) coincide in time. While my earliest draft of my proposal
was much more about direct confrontation and obvious examples of the daily trappings of capitalism, I felt by building a future world using the key imagery and terminology of neo-liberal capitalism I could cover more varied topics, be more creative with visuals, and it honestly just fit my style more. Under marker 1 I’ve tried to stop using irony and start using sarcasm, and the satirical nature of INFINITE JEST 2’s imagery is delivered with an air of deadpan that felt very real in the room when showing to a live audience. Satire and politics go hand-in-hand in a way irony and politics don’t (see: Kanye West’s “ironic” use of the now infamous Trump “Make American Great Again” cap going over about as well as... something that doesn't go over well.) [Okay... a lot has happened since I wrote these words. I still categorize this as “ironic” as Kanye has been forthright about trying to change the meaning of the hat, but... yeah, I might be the only one left “defending” him here and even I’m pissed.]

The process of the project developed around the concept of key “modules” that would serve as anchor points for the collected visuals. For the most part these sections were the originally shot pieces: Gretel's Grill, Nerdy Kid Raps Fast, Serene Irene's ASMR video, the Mineral comment, M1 Action News' 2024 election broadcast were all recorded specifically for the project. The What You See Before You Die cut-ins and the Stretch Armstrong music video/montage (much of which got cut) were the other pivotal points to work around. The visuals in between serve to build world and atmosphere: for The Feed to work within the narrative it has to give the audience some things it probably recognizes. This is built to be as seamless as possible, with original clips and gathered materials melting together into an indistinguishable content-stew. When showing early
cuts to trusted friends, much of the "testing" process involved seeing if people could tell what was altered, or in some cases what was entirely original. The use of these visuals from the collective internet consciousness make the experience of The Feed possible.

Since this whole "copyright" issue should probably be addressed at some point, now seems as good as ever. I'm calling fair use on INFINITE JEST 2, as it’s a non-profit piece that re-contextualizes all the clips used for a function other than the original intended value. When fair-use has been defended in court, monetized fair use at that, judge's decision has been upheld that when the intention of viewing for the new piece is assertively different from the original video it falls under fair use. Furthermore, the clear presence of satire and social commentary covers the use of existing materials for political comment. Considering all these factors this selection from the College Art Association’s "Code of Fair Use for Best Practices in Visual Arts" breaks down how fair use relates to visually arts very succinctly:

“For centuries, artists have incorporated the work of others as part of their creative practice. Today, many artists occasionally or routinely reference and incorporate artworks and other cultural productions in their own creations. Such quotation is part of the construction of new culture, which necessarily builds on existing culture. It often provides a new interpretation of existing works, and may (or may not) be deliberately confrontational. Increasingly, artists employ digital tools to incorporate existing (including digital) works into their own, making uses that range from pastiche and collage (remix), to the creation of new soundscapes and lightscapes. Sometimes this copying is of a kind that might infringe copyright, and sometimes not. But whatever the technique, and whatever may be used (from motifs or themes to specific images, text, or sounds), new art can be generated.” (College Art Association, 2015).
The political nature of *INFINITE JEST 2* is something that, while perhaps not readily apparent, seeps into all aspects of The Feed’s visual stew. This can be studied through the lens of two of the first original pieces I produced for the project: the M1 Action News segment covering the 2024 election throughout the broadcast and the section titled *Nerdy Kid Raps Fast*, a horror short about a man drinking his own pee.

Starting on the former makes more sense than the latter. The news segments are perhaps the most obviously political part of *INFINITE JEST 2*, showing a heightened reality-TV style coverage of an election in which two personas of the same person are running against each other. This comments firstly on the relative similarity of the two modern political parties. The idea that so little substantive systematic change happens president to president isn’t necessarily new, but combining that with aspects of carefully controlled branding and identity under capitalism and synthesizing it through The Rock is where I think the messages begin to come together. For starters, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson’s teased presidential aspirations are rooted more-so in the idea of celebrity transcending the under-handedness of politics instead of being so deeply invested in it like Trump is. The squeaky clean image Johnson has maintained with “progressive” (read: pro gay marriage) political views and a “let’s all just get along” mentality would almost make you forget his toothy smile has graced the covers of Republican magazines. His out of this world charisma makes him an ideal candidate to win over the public on superficiality. The roots in real rumor and the dual natured identity of Johnson/The Rock made him an ideal avatar to express these ideas.
Identity is another big key of *INFINITE JEST 2*. Johnson/The Rock are the same person but two different identities being co-opted for a cause. The fact that the man these separate identities are based on are the same doesn’t matter. We only interact with Johnson and The Rock through media and in the media’s repurposing of Johnson’s single image he becomes two separate people. The fact that this makes the system of voting truly completely meaningless isn’t exactly a subtle comment on the 2016 election but I think it clicks in enough different ways that it provides depth beyond that surface allegory.

*Nerdy Kid Raps Fast* is also about political/media identity and the 2016 election, although you wouldn’t be faulted for not seeing that right away. The internet was more important in the 2016 election than ever before, and that’s almost with no argument. Trump was able to weaponize fringe internet cultures entrenched in societal outcast, specifically those on sites like 4chan that have been widely influential in internet culture. Being entirely public and anonymous, 4chan has built up close knit and niche communities for certain interests but also communities founded on political and societal hate- hate that lacks repercussions. It also creates a setting where people feel comfortable sharing their dark or gross secrets or habits, and often these socially unacceptable habits and toxic political beliefs go hand in hand. Boards on 4chan such as /pol/ become collages of posts ranging from racial slur-filled tirades to people showing off dead bug collections, semen covered towels and their collection of urine bottles.

So here everything is brought back around. I lump in a trend of “fast rap” for humor and flavor, but also as a comment on what people go through for internet fame.
The putrid, over-exposed browns of the shaky water drinking montage serves as homage to grindhouse flicks, specifically emulating *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. *Nerdy Kid Raps Fast* is intended to be a horror short and I wanted to shoot it as such, even though the fear is existential rather than literal. Much as The Rock has a carefully crafted and controlled identity (or two), the titular Nerdy Kid has to create a faux “geek” personality to gain internet followers (a trend that exists in real life as well). The de-humanization of the self comes through the societally unacceptable acts of the internet alt-right. One must separate themselves from their internet persona, and the Nerdy Kid accomplishes this by consuming his own waste. Similarly, this blanket of anonymity these websites provide is pulled back from the Nerdy Kid- instead of seeing the video he records and uploads, we end just as he begins. The audience sees the private and unpolished persona; the disgusting acts needed to separate one from the other.

If we extrapolate far enough, we can assume The Rock has gone through a similar devolution to maintain his personas. Together they show two sides of the same coin: a man who has sold his humanity so far to the point where he is now the first and second most famous person in the world, and a kid who sees this as the American dream, and strives for this at the cost of his own “normal” social life and well-being. In *INFINITE JEST 2*’s hyper-active 2024, this type of disassociation is necessary for your identity to be broadly marketable to as many people as possible.

These connections in themes come up throughout *INFINITE JEST 2*, with all the major pieces touching on the politics of identity and media under capitalism in some way. The biggest framing piece, exploring the on-set dilemmas of a Gretel’s Grill
commercial shoot, explores the intersection of brand identity and personal identity in a more intimate way. This is the only piece to really have characters- or at least ones that interact meaningfully with each other. These sections are important not only to the themes of *INFINITE JEST 2* but is completely essential to the structure of The Feed's pacing. It also serves as an important touchstone as it is the only "real" shoot using professional lighting and camera equipment and utilized Ohio University's Studio C for location and effects.

The level of involvement and the need for the piece to really work made the Gretel's Grill shoot one of the more looming events on our thesis calendar. Not taking place until March, it would be one of the last segments completed despite being the most integral. I wanted as much time to prepare and make sure I could give the writing, filming, and editing the time they deserved while working around an extremely tight schedule. Thus it is with great relief I can say that the Gretel's Grill segments are the parts of *INFINITE JEST 2* I am most proud of.

Noah, Cobi, Maeve and Sid on set all worked as both actors and crew. Throughout production they were all such incredible help, and without their active involvement in helping me make my nonsensical visions a watchable reality, *INFINITE JEST 2* wouldn't exist. Their continued enthusiasm let me recast my core of actors in many different roles, further building the atmosphere and themes of identity crisis. The different characters a single actor plays may overlap or allude to one another (or in the case of Irene, be in two segments), which is meant to reflect the dreamy yet familiar nature of The Feed, spitting out the same faces at the viewer with no real regard for what characters end where and
begin somewhere else. This decision was also practical, keeping as few people involved on-screen as possible made fitting the videos together much easier, but instead of accepting this as a shortcoming of the film I wanted to integrate it into the themes of the pieces as close as I possibly could.

The shoot itself went really well and I was excited about the footage, but the tone on set and the final tone of the videos were very different, for the better. With everyone on set being friends and joking around, the script felt extremely comedic. I wasn't unhappy with this, as it was basically what I expected, but I wondered if it had the depth to anchor the piece, especially with the tertiary elements trending towards a dark, or at least more sarcastic, tone. I was worried about being able to pull off the effects and just generally put off editing the piece after the initial shoot, as getting distance from a project often helps provide perspective. When finally sitting down to edit the footage, I had a new mindset. Much like I did with Nerdy Kid Raps Fast, I decided to try and frame what I had as a nightmarish and surreal horror short. Where Nerdy Kid Raps Fast found this in the gritty handheld cinematography, the glue of Gretel's Grill segment's new mood was a never-ending Italia-disco stylized, yet unsettling, synth piece. The controlled electronic instruments are sterile and pretty, reflecting the image the new Gretel's is meant to project. It draws from the iconic horror scores of John Carpenter and the brilliant repetitions of Philip Glass to create a minimal and moody tone that rises through Studio C's cavernous ceilings.

The final product tries to emphasize the manic and incomprehensible response to capitalism's synthetization of untamed reality into controlled branding. The editing is
chaotic, with green-screen assets blipping in and out of existence: the whole operation is meant to feel as if it is being barely held together with staples and glue. Gretel might be the only truly sympathetic character in the entirety of *INFINITE JEST 2*, largely because she is thrust into this world against her will—she was born into the world of capitalism and her fate was sealed when her father decided to use her identity to market his burgers. The whole thing is still very sarcastic, fitting with the rest of *INFINITE JEST 2*, but in many ways Gretel is the only light of hope throughout The Feed’s wandering narrative, and I think there is a sort of tangible dread to seeing the corporate forces snuff out that flame. The Gretel’s Grill segments were some of the first ideas I had for this project, but only really found themselves in the 11th hour. For better or for worse, this isn’t out of the ordinary.

The creative process of *INFINITE JEST 2* was turbulent, and Brian can attest to that. What he can also (hopefully) attest to is the consistent and earned calm I felt in the face of this storm. While in therapy for anxiety, the most helpful advice I got was to own the way I work. I’ve always needed a spark of inspiration to get started on a project, but I could never force it. There were significant stretches of time where I wouldn’t have new ideas, and we had to trust that I could work on smaller more practical production aspects while I waited for creativity to hit me. This seems very dangerous, but I’ve always worked best this way. I was in therapy because I was so stressed out about my schoolwork but it always got done. If I could keep that up and just not stress about it I could theoretically keep the same schedule and actually end up even more productive.
Looking back it certainly was risky to set up my work schedule this way, but with my own wavering confidence being consistently reinforced by Brian’s encouragement, I was able to complete the entire thirty-five minute film. I take a lot of pride in being able to work “successfully” in the way I find most creatively enriching. In some sense, that is all I can ask for out of a year’s worth of thesis work. (In another sense, a good grade would also be nice.) This wasn’t just an ideological mindset for production, but fundamentally altered the project. Leaving the Gretel’s Grill segment for last despite it being one of the most integral pieces allowed me to shape it around the rest of *INFINITE JEST 2*. I may have had the idea of human rebranding through a Wendy’s allegory in October but the version of that short that fits so well into the rest of the world of *INFINITE JEST 2* couldn’t have been made until months later in March.

The other major late edition was the series of *What You See Before You Die* visualizations, the segment I conceptualized last of all the pieces that made it into *INFINITE JEST 2*. These non-narrative abstract images don’t have any literal connection to the themes of the whole project: the first two, at least, are simply stretched pixels moving at altered speeds. The kinds of rules and structures that defined my progress on the other original pieces didn’t apply here because my decision making process was one-track minded: do what looks the coolest (or, eventually, most beautiful once the complementary idea of death was added). This “othered” aspect of this production is integrated into the final project itself: these clips come in the form of an “update” feed cutting into *INFINITE JEST 2*’s Feed. The context that makes *What You See Before You Die* relevant is presented in the live performance aspect. Through combining the extreme
non-literal with the ‘tour-guide’ nature of the performance aspect of the piece the most non-linear and abstract fragments in *INFINITE JEST 2* become the linear way-points of the live piece’s narrative. Since this live presentation hasn't been something we've explored much, I’d like to touch on that as well.

The connecting point of *What You See Before You Die* exists in the theoretical realm of 2024’s capitalistic nightmare but not in the final product itself. When pitching the idea there was more of a behind the scenes aspect to it that wouldn’t have worked well in the final project as its nature would’ve too closely resembled the Gretel’s Grill segments. The background was essentially that, no matter what the Swiss/Swedish scientists did to produce this imagery (I say both because I’m fairly certain I say both in the final performance), the general reaction was always that it was “pretty nice”. Capitalism isn't able to meaningfully synthesize the experience of life through anything other than assigned value in the system, so a capitalistic regime can only synthesize the climax and closest thing to meaning in life into these unrecognizable fragments of light. In a way, I think I almost invalidated that point by making the visuals too interesting. Not to sound pompous, but the first two *What You See Before You Die* segments are the parts of *INFINITE JEST 2* that people who watch it seem to want to talk to me about. Don’t get me wrong, I am very pleased in the end result, but the narrative certainly switches from a kind of ambien induced feverish haze into something my audiences found genuinely captivating.

This led to the “pulling of the rug” with the third segment. Coming much closer to a 1.0 release (whether that is the final edition or not is left up to audience interpretation),
the poppy and obnoxious Sonic and friends dance scene serves as the new punchline.
The intention was always to ultimately subvert any of the “beauty” of the other segments, but with that beauty now being expressed more genuinely a more extreme subversion felt necessary to really drive home the failings of the capitalistic system to meaningfully relate to the individual human experience. Any progress that was made in the ethereal dreaminess of the early editions is invalidated by the devolution of the project. Capitalism is a broken system, and much like a broken clock it can show glimpses of truth that are then revealed to have been viewed under false pretenses. If we assume that capitalism is a success, we can see the jump between the first and the second editions as “progress”. However, under INFINITE JEST 2’s harsh critique of these ideals, the third segment reveals that this “progress” was two uncorrelated and lucky attempts that were really working towards the sickeningly bright colors of Sonic and friends dancing. And that’s it. That’s what “the market” (here controlled by anonymous experts in a country that isn’t known to our presenter) has decided is what you should see before you die, and since the power is out of the people’s hands that becomes the reality.

While perhaps not all of this is directly expressed in INFINITE JEST 2, I think when presented live the mood of that message is delivered in an impactful way. The pacing of the pieces is really important for communicating the context to the audience. Each of the videos starts with the same amount of black screen, the same timing on the title card and so on. This provides a rhythm to how I address these transitions’ “sudden” arrival, as well as sets up a comedic timing for the reveal of the final transmission. Before and after
these sections I would address the audience and give my shallow thoughts on what I’ve seen.

This is how the mood of the background information is given to the audience. My thoughtless positivity and nonchalant presentation paints a picture where corporate interest has invaded even the most whimsical of sciences to take away any of the magic or optimism of learning about the world. The reaction is best described as “impressed by the latest model”, which is far from the emotional richness that should be provided by such an ambitious scientific venture.

The presentation aspect of *INFINITE JEST 2* is one that became less emphasized as the thesis process went on. Thus, in the organization of my mind, it is easy to forget what an incredibly large role it played in building the world of 2024. Before delving into the choices made when building the set and script of *INFINITE JEST 2 Live*, there’s a definite a sort of hindsight to be addressed. Early on in the process a live presentation was essentially the deliverable for this project. There were a lot of ideas thrown around: at different points in planning there was a *1984*/*Apple parody*, televisions being destroyed, a popcorn salesman, theater glass, I could list this stuff for days. However, as I continued deeper into the video production side of the project during early spring semester I began to think the video feed itself stood enough on its two feet that a goofy presentation almost undermined the tone of the film.

I decided on a more subdued approach, at least from an acting perspective. I had planned to put on a more eccentric persona, but with the piece being so surreal in tone I
thought my role was to be a guide through this strange digital museum. The set comprised three antiquated CRT televisions looping original visual fragments off of VHS tapes. This connection to days of media past is the biggest remaining thread from the MEGA 96 project I started last summer, but the nature of The Feed as a medium ties the live presentation and the film itself together into one cohesive piece.

At a point in this process, a few days before the presentation itself, I would've said I wish I hadn't booked the room and announced the show. I didn't feel like the live aspect was warranted. In the feverish haze of editing the final cut the week of, (the last export coming six hours before the show) I didn't give as much attention as I felt like I needed. In the hours leading up to show time I was able to run through possible lines and go through the motions of my act, and I was able to put together a small and simple introduction I was fairly happy with. I also addressed the crowd to introduce the What You See Before You Die segments as planned. Other than those set pieces and a handful of mostly unrelated audience interaction pieces, the video portion of INFINITE JEST 2 was given the spotlight.

If I had more time or could redo an aspect of the process, I would have wanted to plan a live portion that I felt fit the final version of INFINITE JEST 2. That was probably the big flaw in my process: in many ways it ended up leaving the performance out to dry. While it ended up being helpful savings big projects like the Gretel's Grill shoot for later because they could be adapted to the existing materials, to really have a complex and relevant performance I would've likely had to have had a final cut done much earlier than six hours before. This isn't to say I'm unhappy with the live performance, I'm actually
quite happy with it. It's just that the scale of the show ended up being much smaller than initially planned, and that's not really for better or worse.

What I feel like homogenizes INFINITE JEST 2’s hectic blips into a semi-cohesive experience is the soundtrack. Nearly all of the music featured in the video is an original composition or remix I've made under my artist alias marker 1. Even the existing songs I've pulled from the cultural consciousness I've filtered or altered in some way to mold them for the world of 2024. This was a personal touch I thought would make INFINITE JEST 2 a unique and yet singular world that feels consistent.

My journey as an ambient electronic producer is a strange one because it exists simultaneous to and yet outside of my academic experience. I started taking music seriously early my freshman year when a friend and I started making songs to help motivate his roommate Max, a music production major, to work on things as well. As the year went on we all improved, and while Max eventually left to pursue music full time I kept working on it as a hobby alongside my more visual based studies. Progress was at first slow, but in early 2017 I had a creative surge musically and released my first official project, CASIO LULLABIES: Aural Passages for Future-Sleep. This release got me a handful of show bookings and slowly my music and live performance became one with my visual work.

The music of 2024 is often without traditional structure or aimlessly repetitive, and this is both an accentuated stylistic decision for INFINITE JEST 2 as well as a general trait of my prior marker 1 projects. I’ve never taken any formal classes on music
composition and have too little attention span for online tutorials, so most of my improvement is through brute force trial and error. This slow and stubborn process is likely a key factor in why I haven’t made anything I’ve found worth releasing until last year, but I also think it leads to a unique sound that breathes life into what would otherwise be slower moments in *INFINITE JEST 2*’s runtime. Many times even the most pre-planned of my shoots (*Nerdy Kid Raps Fast*, the Gretel’s Grill shoot, the song comment segment) wouldn’t really come together as we know them until the accompanying soundtrack piece was completed and mixed with the now long-existing visuals. These elements working together seems so obvious in hindsight. Looking back on my four years at Ohio University, however, it can be summarized by the eight semesters it took of searching for how to meaningfully relate my interests in abstract visuals, political geography, and composing music. *INFINITE JEST 2* is that final end result.

As much as I want to emphasize these theoretical underpinnings and academic connections that are integral to the piece, I also want to be straightforward with the fact that *INFINITE JEST 2* is an entirely impractical art project. There’s no target audience for *INFINITE JEST 2* other than *INFINITE JEST 2*, and from a business perspective I could probably never directly make a dime off it. In many ways, *INFINITE JEST 2* is the type of project, I feel, the School of Media Arts & Studies school discourages.

When talking to HTC media alumnus Joe Cox about *INFINITE JEST 2* pro-prequel *heavy OBSELESENCE* (a 48-Hour Shootout project we created that evolved into a live art installation/pile of garbage) he talked about wanting to use this weird little trash
film as a platform to \“[ask] how to bring the 'art' back to 'media arts and studies'\” (Votaw, 2017). Much of what is taught in the School of Media is about technical and practical skills. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but for where my interests lie it made traversing the department and its class selection difficult at times. This, to me, is where the Honors Tutorial College came most in handy. By being able to design my own tutorials I was able to try and seduce the curriculum my way. I've unfortunately had to tell prospective students that while I wholeheartedly recommend applying to HTC and HTC Media specifically, when it comes to enrolling in the standard media school my answer is \“I don't know\”. This isn't a condemnation by any means, but more so a reflection on my own experience in HTC Media. Given the freedom I experienced with the direction of my coursework, I feel my experience in honors media was so fundamentally different from the standard media experience that I can't say I really went through the Scripps School of Media. This discrepancy, from the side I'm standing on, seems monumental, and I don't know if other students are getting this in-depth and artful of an experience when taking media classes. I'm not saying they're not, but I just don't know. Even in talking to my fellow HTC media students, I feel like many of them are going down a road focusing on the business or practical side of media. I'm happy for them, but I do believe that if more people were exposed to experimental and important media arts we would have more projects being created like \textit{JEST 2} (whether that's a good thing or not is a whole different question).

This is the first project I've completed for school that I feel legitimately proud of, and I think a huge part of that was me finally letting go of any sort of pretense of
practicality. As I look towards my academic future and grad school looms, I'm really kind of banking on an full embrace of impracticality working out for me as long as I keep advancing my craft. If you went back and listened to my music from even the beginning of 2017... well you can't, I wouldn't let you. It's embarrassing and I never actually made it public. In that year and three months I learned and applied my skills enough to compose music for a half hour short film. While it's naïve to say this rate of exponential growth will continue through grad school, I've found the thesis process really scratched my creative itch in a way that led to a lot of productive and deep learning experiences. As I move towards the headier and more tightly focused world of grad school I can only hope for the academic experience of this year, as stressful as it may have been, to be replicated.

That's a lot of what I learned through working on INFINITE JEST 2. I came to understand my own creative process and really what my creative identity is. marker 1 became what it is today via the thesis process and that’s a part of my work I don't see changing any time soon. I learned what aspects of my distinct style are: the way I wrote all of the dialogue in the Gretel's Grill piece to be inhuman and spacey or shooting in almost entirely long takes are decisions I was able to make based on a thorough understand of what I enjoy in media and what I am good at creating. I feel more prepared for my creative future than I ever have, or even ever thought I could be, and because of this process and the conversations Brian and I had along the way I feel comfortable calling myself an artist. If you went back four years and told wide-eyed young Hiatt that was ever even a possibility that would blow my mind. I came into HTC wanting to do
broadcast, and with that as the majority of my background. I don’t think there’s much of that version of me left and I have no doubt in my mind that that’s a good thing.

I can’t ask for anything else from this experience. I developed invaluable technical, theoretical and personal skills and beliefs and along the way happened to create a half hour film I feel confident showing anyone on the planet as a representation of me as an artist. Not only that, but I was able to share the experience that culminated the last four years of my studies with the people who made those four years so enjoyable. I’m not one for nostalgia (clearly), but on top of viewing this as an enriching academic experience, it really will be a sentimental period I will certainly remember forever.

Forever? Infinite?

Good memories? Jest?

Maybe INFINITE JEST 2 wasn't a thesis project, but really the friends I made along the way.
WORKS CITED

