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Agents of Production: Music

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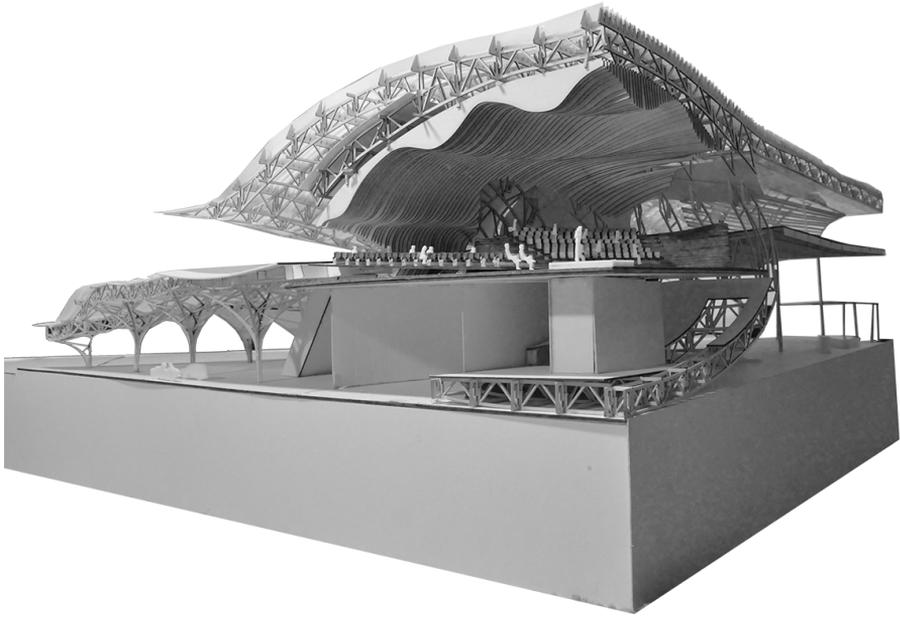
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DEVOTED DATUM THINKER JILL MALTBY INTRODUCES US TO THE CONCEPT OF HER WAY OF GETTING THROUGH A PROJECT WITH HER STRATEGIC MUSIC SELECTIONS, WHILE SUNCICA JASAROVIC + DAKE LI + CHENGLONG ZHAO'S SAN FRANCISCO JAZZ HOUSE PROJECT SHOWS US THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTRACTING YOURSELF WITH NETFLIX WHILE UNDERTAKING AN INCREDIBLY-TIME CONSUMING MODEL.

LENS // MUSIC

As many of us know so well, results rely on process, a process that often times is specific to the individual doing the producing. Habitually, I listen to the same song until I feel I've accomplished something. Some might view this as a form of punishment. Comparatively, others might see this as a form of focus, shifting into an almost trance-like state, allowing surroundings to fade even further away. Some might not listen to anything intentionally when working; instead relying on surrounding chance encounters to jumpstart their productive atmosphere. [Wait – is the sound of our surrounding environment really considered music? You bet: just ask John Cage.]

We all use some external agent of production when attempting productivity; often times, we use music.

Music is an initiator of both solitary and social experience. This continues to be the case as we have more access to music than any generation to ever come before us, and our options are endless. Live performance, portable devices, real-time streaming, we have unlimited access almost without interruption. Some even go as far to use one song as a commuting strategy, another band as our pre-production mode, and finally yet another genre when actually putting pen to page (or cursor to screen, rather). Given the many ways song can impact the design process, how are we to know which song/album/playlist puts us in a productive state of mind? When are you actually in control of when you decide you're producing?

Personally, my measure of control is repetition. Knowing I can rely on the same layers of a song, the same lyric, the same beat introduction, the same resolutions; I know what change to expect. The less change introduced, the better. I achieve more, I think more, and I maintain focus for longer. Expectations eventually blend into the background and everything becomes balanced. The moment I'm ready to navigate away from a song, I feel more satisfaction than I do physically crossing something off of a to-do list. We all can think back to points where we now blame a song or album for undesirable results of an intense production session. Not too long ago, I called upon the punk-pop swagger of Patrick Stump when I used "Explode" to aid in conceptualization of the mausoleum project under the direction of James Spiller. If you're next to a computer, or by any of the aforementioned "unlimited access" points, pull up that track and this next bit will make all of the sense.

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I listed to that track 62 times. How do I remember 62 exactly? Because that's how many times I spot-treated a stack of blue foam only to watch it eat itself away to produce almost wispy subtractions from the mass. It gets better. The spray paint was yellow, so as you can imagine, I was humbled to present a nearly bio-hazardous, unnaturally green, half chemically altered 2' x 2' mass to James Spiller the next day. His reaction, "Maltby, this might be the ugliest thing I've ever seen in the best way possible." Upon questioning how I arrived with this product, I couldn't think of anything so to say or do other than to have Spiller listen to the same song. Suddenly, we were on the same page. Sure, I wasn't allowed to listen to that song again for the rest of the semester BUT I secured a process I knew made me feel something, and those observing my work could map the process trail.

This account allowed me to identify the need for music to help distinguish mood. Many of us NEED what we're listening to match our already apparent mood. However, some use music to snap out of a mindset and jump into an alternate mode. In the case of my utilization of Patrick Stump, I didn't feel I had a concept worth building from, I knew I needed something by the next day, and somehow a song entitled "Explode" seemed promising. I utilized the highly contrasting energy from the song and transplanted it into my project more or less hoping for the best. However, once a mood is realized, several listen to music with similar characteristics in order to sustain said mood. Maybe they don't utilize the same song, but they do tend to seek music that feels the same. As an individual with a fairly consistent mood (severely optimistic might be a good word combination) I need something to distract me from all of the opportunities that surround me. If I can't focus, I feel that I'm missing out on worthwhile human interaction; interaction that often times doesn't allow me to reach any sort of level of completion.

We see this very practice occur across a variety of fields. Specifically, the medical field has been measuring music's productive power

for years. Surgeons have been identified with using music to set the undercurrent of their state of mind when performing an operation. "In surgery, "you do something delicate that is comparable to a concert," said Dr. Claudius Conrad. "It's a situation you want to do the most beautiful music possible, under the most stress" (Johnson). While much of this research is looking to determine whether the presence of music actually improves the performance of the surgeon and their staff, it also acknowledges the presence of a routine. Surgeons acknowledge that different genres regularly drive different types operations. The presence of routine is still dependent on the individual performing the operation. The medical field has since been able to monitor agility, accuracy, and efficiency of surgical team who believe music to have an impact on their performance.

So, do I simply sit down, scroll through a playlist, choose a song and get it poppin'? Absolutely. Is this true for everyone? Yes. Maybe. Well no, not actually. We can all agree that process needs routine and feeling, and we all know how we feel when we produce. Coincidentally, we often can tap back into that same moment of production when we happen across ANYTHING that reminds of us days where significant progress was made. While I can't readily name every song that drove every moment of a project, I can visualize routines of the past should I happen to hear the same song.

Regardless, this piece isn't about who you listen to when you're attacking a project. It's not meant to make you question the process drivers of those around you (well, it's a little bit about that). It's about first creating an awareness of your own method of production so that you might later find a way to help other's get inside your head. It's about figuring how to apply a similar process to multiple aspects of daily life, or maybe finding that your design process deserves a reserved section of your brain to truly function. It's about dedicating attention to attempt to define how you actually produce.

That being said, I'll confirm what you may have been thinking throughout the entirety of this piece: YES accepting what to listen to while writing about music as my agent of production is was quite the undertaking. However, here is how these pages came to be:

ABSTRACT COMPOSITION

LOSE 2NIGHT (EMINEM // ERIC PRYDZ) - THE WHITE PANDA

ABSTRACT REVISION #1

AIN'T IT FUN - PARAMORE

BODY COMPOSITION

LUNA - BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB

LOADED AND ALONE - HINDER

UNDERWATER - VERTICAL HORIZON

BODY EDITING

BINKY - SNARKY PUPPY

FIELD APPLICATION RESEARCH

SAY YOU'LL BE THERE - MØ

REVISION #2

IF I WERE A BOY / YOU OUGHTA KNOW LIVE - BEYONCE

REVISION #3

THINGS ARE CHANGIN' - GARY CLARK JR.

REVISION #4

YOUTH (LIVE) - DAUGHTER

TIME - ELEVATORS

by Jill Maltby

CITATIONS:

Johnson, Carolyn Y. "Musical Surgeon Examines the OR Soundtrack; Research Studies Impact on Doctors, Patients." The Boston Globe (Boston, MA). N.p., 7 Dec. 2009. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.