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Common Creativity: Conversations with Artists and Nonartists

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**COMMON CREATIVITY:
CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTISTS AND NONARTISTS**

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction

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May 2023

This study by: **Will Nachazel**

Entitled: **Common Creativity: Conversations with Artists and Nonartists**

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

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Honors Thesis Reflection

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/HmT5xa7BD1w>

I have always viewed myself as a creative person. Drawing, writing, and storytelling were the realms I thrived in growing up. I'm highly in tune with the part of myself that's constantly coming up with new ideas, and I appreciate when I see creativity in others as well. But what I've noticed recently is that people often treat creativity as if it's a trait that some have and others don't. When you believe this, it becomes an easy way to brush off your own lack of artistic ability, but what *else* are you closing yourself off to? There *must* be more to creativity than perceived skill in the arts. Last year I took a class called Foundations of Positive Psychology with Gary Gute, who knows a ton about creativity. He opened my eyes to some of the misconceptions people tend to have, as well as to the relationship between creativity of mind and other facets of the human experience. This seemed like an exciting topic to explore, but I was apprehensive about committing to a daunting research project. Nikki Harken helped me flesh out some ideas for different creative forms my thesis could take, which were a lot more professionally relevant and interesting to me than a research paper. I eventually landed on the documentary format - it was a genre I had never explored before, and it would give me the opportunity to really develop some practical filmmaking skills while also getting to have interesting conversations on camera with people who fascinated me. I originally intended for the final product to convey more of a pointed overall message, but it turned out to be more of an explorative documentary looking at different people's experiences with and perspectives on creativity. The documentary is 24 minutes long.

After narrowing my project down to a single idea, I started by brainstorming a list of creative people I knew who I might be able to interview. Artists and musicians came easily to mind, but I knew I wanted to explore the diversity of forms creativity can manifest in, so I had to dig a bit to identify potential interview subjects who were creative in less traditional ways. Nikki also helped with the brainstorming process, providing some contacts of professors and other

Will Nachazel

creative people she knew. I ended up with 29 people on this list, which was definitely too many for a short documentary and for my limited time in the semester. At this point, I had to find ways to be more selective. I gave preference to individuals who I knew would have a lot to say, so as to give me more material to work with. I also prioritized creative diversity, which meant removing a lot of musicians and artists as candidates - really, only one of each was plenty. As I started solidifying my list of potential interview subjects, I began reaching out to them to see if they were willing to be interviewed on camera. I laid out general expectations, such as the approximate length and style of the interview. Everyone I asked was willing to do it, so the next step was to figure out what kinds of questions I would ask them. I devoted plenty of time to constructing clear, specific, thought-provoking questions that would draw out interesting answers. For the sake of having some common thematic threads throughout the documentary, there were several questions I intended to ask all of my interview subjects, such as "How would you define creativity?" and "Do you see yourself as a creative person?" However, there were also several questions that were tailored to each individual, since I knew the documentary would give a significant amount of time to each person and their unique story and perspective.

I interviewed people throughout March and April, doing my best to make sure color, lighting, and audio were up to standard before starting each interview, since I was without help for most of them. After each interview, I would then stage B-roll shots of the person doing the thing(s) they talked about in their interview until I was content with the amount of footage I had.

Postproduction was the final and most time-consuming part of the process. Before I could start putting the project together and editing, I had to consolidate and organize all of my video files, labeling all of my B-roll footage and making note of the timestamps associated with each question and answer within the interviews. File organization was a critical step - editing would have taken exponentially longer without it. Then began the process of grouping interview clips together by question, highlighting really good answers and things I definitely wanted to include, and matching B-roll to the things my interview subjects were saying. Once I had the

Will Nachazel

general structure of the documentary built, there were numerous small things to fix, add, remove, adjust, and polish. Every interview had a slightly different audio landscape - some were perfectly clean and crisp, others had a background hum or buzz, and a couple people bumped their mics quite a few times. Once this draft was in a good spot, I spent some time finding appropriate background music from royalty-free websites, giving mind to the strong storytelling influence music has on the viewing experience. Each song conveys a different mood, so a transition in music often signals a change in topic or storyline - something I wanted to take advantage of. Finally, I created some simple text graphics for the title and different transitions, and recorded some bits of voiceover narration to help the story flow logically. After some last finishing touches and troubleshooting with export errors, I at last had a finished product to upload to YouTube.

The final draft amounted to a 24-minute explorative documentary. The project introduces the topic of creativity with a sample of interview subjects' impromptu personal definitions followed by a standard, more academic definition provided by Gary Gute. It then looks into the creative lives of four people: Megan Loonan, whose hobbies include several art forms; Bernie Nachazel, who has done woodworking for 70 years; and Anelia Dimitrova and Rick Truax, a journalist/photojournalist couple who both teach at UNI. After hearing what they have to say about their own creative experiences, the documentary shifts to the topic of flow, a concept within positive psychology and a major area of research for Gary Gute that's closely related to creativity. This is when Luke Foster, who works in church tech, is introduced, and we see a sort of non-traditional manifestation of creativity intertwined with his personal experience of flow. The documentary turns next to address some misconceptions people tend to have about creativity, introducing Doug Shaw, a math professor, to discuss his research interest, collaborative creativity. Finally, the documentary concludes with a scattered assortment of peoples' thoughts about the significance of creativity or their own craft. A brief credits sequence rolls, and the video ends.

Will Nachazel

The vast majority of works on creativity are characterized by a primary focus on art and the brain. While my project certainly touches on each of these things, they are not the major themes. Common Creativity has a particular emphasis on conveying unique, human perspectives from both traditionally creative as well as non-traditionally creative individuals, highlighting the universal nature of creativity by showing a diverse cast of creative characters. Additionally, there is a unique focus on the connection between creativity and flow. In the documentary, Gary Gute mentions that creativity and flow research tend to be very separate in the academic world - each group tends to do their own thing, and they rarely overlap. Thus, my project offers a unique contribution in both the diversity and universality of its ideas as well as in its incorporation of the topic of flow into its exploration.

I've really enjoyed this opportunity to explore an interesting topic in depth and in a way that's been very professionally growing for me. Creativity fascinates me and I love that through this project I'll be able to share the wisdom I've learned with other people through a documentary medium. In addition, the project has given me some excellent experience with a genre I hadn't been very familiar with before. With fiction and narrative forms, which are what I'm accustomed to, every piece of footage has a spot in the story - I don't have to think about where every moment is going to end up in the story, because the story is already written! So with documentary form, a lot of what I've learned has had to do with drawing a story out of a jumbled mess of content. The structure and overall flow of the film is not inherent from the start - you have to find it along the way. This is why postproduction ended up being such a gargantuan task to tackle - not only did I have to watch through all my interviews multiple times, but I also had take physical notes on them, draw out a topic web to map out potential story paths, and rearrange pieces countless times while editing to craft a narrative that made sense and flowed logically. This only scratches the surface, but I've learned so much from this project, and I'm excited to do more work like this in my professional future!