One Man Trance

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Intermedia and Digital Arts 2020

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Introduction

Where we humans spend most of our time becomes representative of our subconscious.¹ Our everyday movements and mannerisms are recorded in our environments. Your self becomes the space. Your rooms become your existing knowledge base.² Writing on or creating in those environments can allow you to alter your self. In the multimedia installation *One Man Trance*, I use my everyday environments and actions to create, replay, and edit ideas – a new form of self-hypnosis for keeping my subconscious constantly engaged in a loop with my conscious output.

The installation is structured around the four rooms where I spend most of my time: bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and exercise room. The actions I carry out most often in each of these rooms respectively – watch TV, stand in front of the mirror, stare into the pantry, use the exercise bike – are all turned into actions that are used to trigger visuals of my handwritten notes, typed text as well as audio recordings of

¹ I mean "we" to be read as contemporary humanity in general, but I am aware there are moments in the paper where "we" may refer to those living in specific cultures and class brackets. Parsing those distinctions goes beyond the scope of this iteration of my research, however. Regarding my use of the term "subconscious" throughout the paper: In my hypnosis training through the National Guild of Hypnotists, "subconscious" was used instead of "unconscious" to describe what takes place below conscious awareness. This distinction helps avoid confusion with clinical hypnosis, which may use the clinical term "unconscious" more often. I am a Certified Hypnotist, but cannot claim to be a Hypnotherapist, as this requires a medical or psychological certification.

² The base of this paper is the footnotes. Just as literary theorist Leo Bersani writes of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* that the footnotes play the role of Freud's own subconscious below the text proper, my artist touchstones in this paper will appear in the footnotes as the subconscious foundation I am using on which to build my own work. Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 18.

hypnotic scripts (and vice versa). I am combining habitual actions in these familiar spaces with the ability to self-review and self-renew. I am opening my everyday to self-programming opportunities, performing habitual behaviors to a self-score that reclaims daydreams for self-hypnotic possibilities.³

Domestic Environments

"What we are is the sum of everything we have ever said, done, and felt - all wrapped up in one unique thread which is constantly being revised and remembered. So to be yourself, you have to constantly remember yourself. It's a full time job, but that's how it works."

- From the film *Trance* (2013), directed by Danny Boyle⁴

Everyday environments play an important role in shaping and maintaining our

conscious and subconscious minds.⁵ A psychological experiment conducted in 1979

proved that living in a space stocked with newspapers, books, music, and photographs

³ Hypnotists and clients have the same relationship as artists and viewers. Renowned magician turned skeptic James Randi says about hypnotism that it is "an agreement between an operator and a subject to fantasize together." In a similar way, the artist must create the work and a viewer must experience the work for the idea to be communicated. "Hypnotism in the Name of Jesus," John Michael Hinton, accessed April 26, 2020, <u>http://www.johnmichaelhinton.com/hypnotism-in-the-name-of-jesus/</u>. ⁴ *Trance*, dir. by Danny Boyle (Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2013), film. The plot of *Trance* involves a hypnotist who hypnotizes an art auctioneer to steal Francisco Goya's 1798 painting *Witches in the Air* from the auction house he works for.

⁵ The early video work of William Wegman shows the important role everyday environments play in creativity. Wegman uses everyday things like deodorant, chairs, lights, sandwiches, and his dog to create videos considered both high and low art. Wegman's creativity in his early videos sprang from combining things from around the house into funny and elaborate scenarios. This churning of combination and creation from what surrounds us is key to my work *One Man Trance*. I adapted my routines in the place I live to suit the needs of my creativity. Each station becomes a hypnotic scenario, turning something familiar into art when combined with my creative fantasy. Roni Feinstein, "Dogged Persistence: William Wegman Is Equally at Home-and Equally Eccentric-in Video, Photography and Painting," *Art in America* 95(5) (2007):178-183.

from 1959, plus speaking to others in that space as if it was 1959, made the 70-yearold participants feel, act, and appear younger. "On intelligence tests, 63 percent of the experimental group improved their scores, compared to only 44 percent of the control group. There were also improvements in height, weight, gait, and posture."⁶ Objective outside observers also claimed the participants looked younger. In the same way, you and your environment can work together to creatively program your self.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard has also espoused a link between the subconscious and our domestic environments.⁷ Bachelard asserts: "Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams."⁸ The most intimate moments of our lives happen within the walls of our living space, so it must be charged with more emotional power than an office cubicle or cafeteria. Bachelard also believed this is why domestic environments show up often in our dreams. "We are hypnotized by

⁶ Ellen J. Langer, *Counterclockwise* (New York: Random House, 2009), Kindle edition.

⁷ Artist Bruce Nauman links the artist and the artist's studio environment in the same way my work *One Man Trance* links the artist and their domestic environment. Nauman believes whatever the artist does in the studio must be art. I believe whatever the artist does in their domestic environment can be art. An artist's activities in the studio and an artist's activities at home can both carry the same subconscious weight. Routines can develop in both the studio and domestic spheres which limit or expand the potential for something interesting to be noticed. Like Nauman, my bathroom vanity self-hypnosis station (to be described later) opens the installation, just as Nauman's *Venice Fountains* (2007) greeted viewers at MoMA for his exhibition *Disappearing Acts*. Nauman's fountain installation refers to his own *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (1966-67/1970) as well as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917). See footnote 39 for more on Duchamp's *Fountain*. Peter Malone, "Giving Bruce Nauman a Makeover," *Hyperallergic*, November 7, 2018, accessed April 29, 2020, <u>https://hyperallergic.com/469733/giving-bruce-nauman-a-makeover/</u>.

^{2014),} Kindle edition.

solitude," he writes, "hypnotized by the gaze of the solitary house; and the tie that binds us to it is so strong that we begin to dream of nothing but a solitary house in the night."⁹ Our houses already have the hypnotic pull of our routines running through them. The pull is so strong that it makes its way into our dreams.

Using the domestic surroundings as a key to self-programming can also be seen in two works of fiction: *Time and Again* by Jack Finney, and *Somewhere in Time* by Richard Matheson.¹⁰ In both novels, self-hypnosis is used in an environment specifically crafted to look like the year the subject wants to travel back to. In *Time and Again*, the environment is a room in the Dakota Apartment building in New York City that was empty in the year 1882. In *Somewhere in Time*, the environment is a room in the Hotel del Coronado in the year 1896. Both time-travelers specifically arrange their environment with items that existed only in that time in order for the self-hypnosis to work.

Just like *Time and Again* and *Somewhere in Time*, which are about not being able to see anything not of a certain era, my work *One Man Trance* is about not being able to see anything that doesn't actively display my subconscious – whether as handwritten whiteboard notes, digitized dream journals, or typed notes.¹¹ Even if just

⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

¹⁰ Jack Finney, *Time and Again* (New York: Touchstone, 2014), Kindle edition. Richard Matheson, *Somewhere in Time* (New York: Tor Books, 2008), Kindle edition.

¹¹ Graphic aspects of my whiteboards are similar to the works of Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi. Perjovschi uses simple, cartoon-like drawings to illustrate complex political perspectives. He creates his thick-lined, usually black-and-white works directly on walls, as he did at the MoMA in his 2007 exhibition "WHAT HAPPENED TO US?" During this site-specific exhibition, Perjovschi took two weeks to fill the walls with his drawings live, just as I create my whiteboards live during my daily performance in the gallery. Perjovschi's drawings are image-based,

seen in my peripheral vision, my subconscious is still being influenced by what is written. Pairing my subconscious display with hypnotic suggestion allows my subconscious to work for me. By constantly remembering myself when I am creating, I can also put my subconscious house in order.



Figure 1. Whiteboard from September 6, 2019.

Existential Opportunity

Mail-in DNA tests provide an opportunity to see the blueprint of where your

subconscious is housed. Analyzing the raw data that some companies provide with

your results can springboard a search for self that keeps pace with cutting-edge

whereas mine are more text-based. In future work I plan to animate more images during the playback of my whiteboards. Dan Perjovschi, "WHAT HAPPENED TO US? at MoMA," The Museum of Modern Art, New York, April 2007, accessed February 19, 2020, <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkXXNGfx_3k</u>.

scientific research. I recently received my DNA results from 23andme.¹² It provided me the raw data to track the specific gene codes for an enzyme in the brain called catechol-O-methyltransferase (COMT).¹³ COMT is the mechanism our brains use to sweep up the extra dopamine that is floating around without a purpose. COMT works better at cleaning up dopamine for some people and worse for others (fig. 2).¹⁴

- G/G: higher COMT activity, lower dopamine & norepinephrine, higher pain tolerance (Val)
- A/G: intermediate COMT activity (most common genotype)
- A/A: 40% lower COMT activity, higher dopamine & norepinephrine, lower pain tolerance (Met), reduced stress resiliency

Figure 2. Screenshot from "COMT – A Gene that Affects Your Neurotransmitter Levels," Genetic Lifehacks, accessed February 13, 2020, <u>https://www.geneticlifehacks.com/comt-genetic-connections-to-neurotransmitter-levels/</u>.

The key to determining how well your COMT enzyme works is to look at the combination of valine (val) or methionine (met) on a certain rung of your DNA, rs4680. In the sweeping up of dopamine, val is considered the industrious enzyme, while met is considered lazy. About 50% of people are val/met combinations, meaning there is an average amount of dopamine left in the brain. About 25% are val/val, meaning their COMT enzyme works overtime to clean up the extra dopamine. The other 25% of people are met/met, meaning they have a lot of extra

¹² 23andme is a personal genetics testing company that provides information on traits, ancestry, and health for a price.

¹³ COMT is pronounced as one word, not as individual letters.

¹⁴ Erik Vance, *Suggestible You* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2016), Kindle edition.

dopamine left in their brains. All the extra dopamine in the brain of a met/met means they rate experiences as more pleasurable than val/vals or val/mets. But most interesting of all – met/mets are much more prone to respond to placebos and suggestion.¹⁵



Figure 3. Screenshot of my raw DNA data for marker rs4680 (COMT) from "Your Raw Data," 23andme, accessed February 10, 2020, <u>https://www.23andme.com/</u>.

My DNA results show that I am met/met, part of the 25% of the population that responds strongly to placebos and suggestion (fig. 3). This is key in providing a foundation for my self-programming practice. First, knowing I respond better to placebos and suggestion, I can score my environment to shape my life in whichever way I desire. Second, knowing I am met/met also acts as a deeper convincer for my subconscious to grab onto whatever it sees/hears being suggested. Third, knowing carriers of the COMT met/met allele have also been found to have higher degrees of hypnotizability lends scientific validity to providing my own placebo/self-hypnotic

¹⁵ Kathryn T. Hall et al., "Genetics and the Placebo Effect: The Placebome," *Trends in Molecular Medicine* 21 (5) (2020): 285–94, accessed February 10, 2020, doi:10.1016/j.molmed.2015.02.009.

experiences.¹⁶ Since those who are met-met respond positively to placebos, even if they know they are taking a placebo, there is no need to remove myself from creating suggestion scripts.¹⁷ Because of this new knowledge, I have the existential opportunity to shape what I become through my actions in everyday environments more quickly and efficiently than most of the population.

Hedonic Adaptation

"A lot of placebo involves storytelling – pull someone out of the everyday, shock them a little bit, and try to create a story that forces your brain to start treating itself."

Erik Vance, science writer, 2018¹⁸

Most of us approach everyday activities automatically, without thinking about them. We eat, sleep, and bathe in the same environments and follow the same patterns daily. We have lost awareness of the foundational expectations we attach to performing these everyday rituals. The loss of initial pleasure to the familiar is called hedonic adaptation. A way to recover that initial enjoyment is to approach such activities unconventionally. Variety in consumption and interaction re-injects the pleasure of newness into activities that have become dull through over-rehearsal. For example, to find renewed pleasure in a simple task like drinking water, instead of

¹⁶ Christian Rominger et al., "Carriers of the COMT Met/Met Allele Have Higher Degrees of Hypnotizability, Provided That They Have Good Attentional Control: A Case of Gene–Trait Interaction," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, no. 4 (2014): 455, accessed February 3, 2020, doi:10.1080/00207144.2014.931177.

 ¹⁷ Taking a placebo you already know is a placebo is called an "honest placebo" or an "open label placebo." Rich Hardy, "The 'Honest' Placebo: When Drugs Still Work Even Though Patients Know They're Fake," *New Atlas*, October 10, 2018, accessed March 26, 2020, <u>https://newatlas.com/honest-placebo-treatment-research/56720/</u>.
¹⁸ PBS NewsHour, "The Science of Using Your Expectations to Relieve Pain," April 2018, accessed March 15, 2020, <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSEr3A-pMsw</u>.

drinking it out of a cup, drink it from a Ziploc bag held over your head with a pinhole in it.¹⁹ Changing the way we perform everyday actions can not only be pleasurable, but also phenomenologically refreshing. We can create new opportunities to reclaim and re-experience large chunks of our life made up of small necessary actions, now remade to feel and sound new.²⁰ We can again remember what we expect from our actions, potentially enhancing their effectiveness.

Another way to build upon the programmed habits of our lives is through "habit stacking." Habit stacking, or piggybacking, involves using cues from regular behaviors to begin building new habits. So if you wanted to start doing push-ups, find a behavior you already do everyday, like using the bathroom, and do pushups every time you exit the bathroom throughout the day.²¹ It is recommended that you start with one push-up after every bathroom break, but this can quickly build into bigger sets. When totaled up, soon you will be able to do over 100 push-ups spread throughout the day. This same slow accumulation is seen in my work through pairing

¹⁹ Ed O'Brien, and Robert W. Smith, "Unconventional Consumption Methods and Enjoying Things Consumed: Recapturing the 'First-Time' Experience," *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (January 2019): 67, accessed November 13, 2019, doi:10.1177/0146167218779823.

²⁰ An artist who works with ideas of hedonic adaptation is Jan Hakon Erichson. Over the last sixteen years, Erichson has used everyday items and changes how they are used in short videos he shoots from his studio in Oslo, Norway. He posts his short videos to social media platforms like Instagram and has seen many go viral. He is most well known for making different devices and techniques for popping balloons. Similarly in my work, adapting approaches to hypnotic inductions in novel ways can suggest to viewers new self-programming possibilities. See http://www.janhakon.com/.

²¹ Kim Painter, "Want a Good New Habit? Stack It on an Old One," USA Today, August 11, 2015, accessed November 15, 2019,

http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsgo v&AN=edsgcl.425033575&site=eds-live&scope=site.

text with specific movements. A hypnotic script, or even a work of literature, can be split up and experienced throughout the day by stacking it onto something you already do. You can slowly reprogram your subconscious while moving without having to make appointments or reorganize your schedule.

Both hedonic adaptation and habit stacking are similar to the psychological principal of conditioning, which is also a part of the placebo effect. Patient expectations when combined with the sights, sounds, and symbols of a doctor's office can directly influence the effectiveness of a treatment. Placebo researcher Fabrizio Benedetti proved in an experiment that placebo analgesia can make painful shocks feel less painful when paired with conditioning.²² By conditioning his patient to expect a positive outcome, Benedetti managed to boost placebo response rates from 30% to 90%.²³

Social learning can also play a part in placebo effects. Pain researcher Dr. Luana Colloca has performed experiments that prove if a patient observes another patient getting a therapeutic benefit, this can create strong expectations and improve

²² Martina Amanzio and Fabrizio Benedetti, "Neuropharmacological dissection of placebo analgesia: Expectation-activated opioid systems versus conditioningactivated specific subsystems," *Journal of Neuroscience* 19 (1) (1999):484–494, accessed March 3, 2020, doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.19-01-00484.1999. Benedetti hooked a patient up to an electric shock machine and shocked them at the highest level and then asked them to rate the pain. Then Benedetti gave the patient a saline (placebo) injection near the electrode site and told the patient it was a pain killer. Benedetti then shocked the patient again at a lesser intensity, making the patient believe the pain killer injection really worked. The patient reported less pain and was given another placebo painkiller injection near the electrode site. Then Benedetti shocked the patient a third time, back at the original highest intensity and the patient so expected to feel less pain that he really did feel less pain.

²³ Placebo: Cracking the Code, dir. by Jemima Harrison (London, UK: Blue Post, 2002), film.

placebo response rates.²⁴ In the video documentation of my work, I aim to provide observable evidence to viewers that adaptations of my daily routines have resulted in artistic benefits in my life. The more pieces I make in this series related to selfsuggestion through daily activities, the more viewer-participants will believe it is providing me a creative benefit, leading to their eventual benefit if they interact with the installation. The more narratives I create about the performance, the stronger the suggestion will become to my self, as well.

Performance Loop

In addition to interacting with elements in the four sections of the installation, viewers can witness my daily performances within them. My performance involves not just the activation of these self-hypnosis stations, but the creation of new whiteboards to review via the smart mirrors and wall projections.²⁵ I start out in the bathroom area (fig. 9), washing my hands and reviewing the previous day's work in the smart mirror while being primed with hypnotic audio. Next, I enter the kitchen area (fig. 4), potentiating my supplements and making and drinking a whey protein isolate shake. While I wait the recommended 30 minutes for the whey shake to digest, I make a new whiteboard, subconsciously guided by what I saw in the mirror that

²⁴ Dr. Colloca, a professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, summarized these findings in the same PBS NewsHour cited above: "The Science of Using Your Expectations to Relieve Pain," April 2018.

²⁵ Because of the COVID-19 situation, in lieu of documentation of the performance that would have occurred daily in the gallery exhibition (I had intended to live in my installation during gallery hours), <u>I took video of my daily routine as I have been living at home during quarantine</u>, using some of the ideas that were to be in the installation, as well as adaptations of other ideas that were unable to be completed because of lack of studio access.

morning, capturing word by word or chunk by chunk my new ideas, associations, and animations (fig. 1). While I am making the whiteboard, I pull new ideas from it to build on and write these on a separate vertical whiteboard, fit to the size of the smart mirrors in the bathroom and bedroom. As well as writing on the second vertical whiteboard, I also type these ideas into a document on a computer to later be digitized and replayed as text on the one-man band screens (to be discussed shortly).²⁶ After this, I perform a high-intensity, interval-training exercise bike routine for 30 minutes while I review body photos of previous weeks and view health related hypnotic text (fig. 10).

After I cool off from the exercise bike, I relax and watch a live sporting event while I practice my one-man band routine. As I pedal (fig. 8), play midi guitar, and hum into a midi kazoo, screens will activate to display rapid serial visual presentation text of hypnotic inductions, suggestion scripts, my notes, and my dreams, as well as playback from a projector onto the freshly erased surface of the whiteboard I made earlier that day (fig. 7).²⁷ When my fingers hurt from playing music or my calves tire

²⁶ Transcribing the same idea multiple times gives it a greater presence in my subconscious.

²⁷ A work of art that connects the loop and one-man band ideas is Stelarc's *Third Hand*, which he designed, built, and completed in 1980. The work is a mechanical human-like hand, which the Cyprus-born artist would attach to his right arm for performances held throughout the subsequent eighteen years. Stelarc attached electrodes to his legs to amplify and relay muscle contractions to the switching system, which would then cause the hand to move. The live *Third Hand* performances, which took place from 1980 to 1998, would create a loop-like effect as Stelarc would have to figure out the specific muscle signal to make the third hand perform a certain way. His response to the mechanical hand movement would cause him to move his body in a certain way, causing the third hand to move again, causing him to react to it in a loop. *Third Hand* is also similar to the foundational idea of a one-man band as the limbs are doing different things simultaneously which combine to feed into each other to create the effect of a full band. The uncontrollable aspects

from pedaling, I then move to the bed, where I finish the sporting event by watching its reflection in the smart mirror, along with reviewing summaries of notes from that day as well as previous days (fig. 5). To end the performance, I return to the bathroom and use the knee triggers to play an emerging script, to bring me out of the state of active-alert hypnosis under which I had been performing (fig. 9).

Hypnosis and Placebo

People generally regard hypnotists with suspicion.²⁸ Some scholars relate hypnotists to the mythical figure of the trickster because hypnotists cross social,

of the loop effect of *Third Hand* mirror the subconscious loop in *One Man Trance*. By filling a whiteboard with notes and ideas, summarizing it, and then reviewing it in different stages of my performance, I am making my conscious output my subconscious input. I have no control over how my subconscious is affected or if/how the content of the next whiteboard will change. If the content of the next whiteboard is affected, it is also then absorbed subconsciously through review in the smart mirrors to affect the next whiteboard. "Third Hand," Stelarc, accessed March 30, 2020, http://stelarc.org/?catID=20265.

²⁸ People also look at artists with suspicion. One example might be U.S. artist Matt Mullican, who has been experimenting with art-making in a hypnotic state since the 1970s. In these performances, Mullican is hypnotized by a professional hypnotist, often creating large drawings in front of live audiences. When under hypnosis, Mullican appears to regress to a mental state similar to a child, shouting random, sometimes obscene comments, and throwing fits while rolling on the floor. It is up to the audience to decide if Mullican is really under hypnosis, or if he is just performing for the crowd. Similarly, my work makes the viewer question whether these stations will induce hypnotic trances. If users of stations don't feel anything, they must struggle with the same question many hypnotic clients and Mullican audience members think: "Should I play along to be nice?" On a larger scale, my work makes the viewer question if I am a hypnotist or an artist, if those professions are different, or if one can be both. Cedar Pasori, "Virtual Reality and Hypnosis are Matt Mullican's Choice Art Tools," Interview, April 12, 2018, accessed April 5, 2020, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/virtual-reality-hypnosis-matt-mullicanschoice-art-tools.

spatial, or temporal boundaries and can play jokes on superiors.²⁹ In cinema history, hypnotists are always villains.³⁰ In the 18th century, Austrian doctor Franz Mesmer coined the term "animal magnetism," an early form of hypnosis where magnets were used to control the invisible natural forces rushing through the body.³¹ Animal magnetism, later known as mesmerism, was so outlandish that the King of France appointed a committee led by Benjamin Franklin to investigate it. Franklin set up the world's first placebo control trial by performing the theatrics associated with animal magnetism, but never actually magnetized anything. Franklin's committee found Mesmer's phenomena could be explained through imagination and imitation.³² Mesmer had discovered the power of suggestion, but the field of hypnotism was forever relegated to the category of the unscientific.

Kitchen Pantry Placebo Station

Being suggestible or susceptible to hypnosis is also associated with being weak minded and unintelligent. Likewise, people who believe in homeopathic remedies are seen as followers of the unscientific. The kitchen pantry placebo station in my installation explores this issue (fig. 4). In the pantry cabinet, muscle-building

²⁹ Stanley Krippner, "Trance and the Trickster: Hypnosis as a Liminal Phenomenon," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 53 2 (2005):97-118, accessed January 8, 2020, doi:<u>10.1080/00207140590927608</u>.

³⁰ Deirdre Barrett, "Hypnosis in Film and Television," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 49 1 (2006): 13–30, accessed January 20, 2020, doi:10.1080/00029157.2006.10401549.

³¹ Jo Marchant, *Cure: A Journey Into the Science of Mind Over Body* (New York: Crown, 2016), Kindle edition.

³² Franklin's committee also created a secret report for the King's eyes only about the relationship between sex and mesmerism.

and immunity boosting supplement containers are connected to bone conductors,³³ which relay recorded audio of my voice stating my belief in the power of the supplements that will make them more effective. The audio is triggered by a viewer tapping their foot on the drum pedal while standing in front of the open pantry cabinet. The supplement containers can be removed and their contents sampled if a viewer is looking to test their bodily reaction to a specific brand. Or viewers can boost their immune system by taking a placebo-charged Airborne or Emergen-C tablet, which are also on display in the pantry. Just as placebo researcher Dan Moerman talks to his pills to boost their effectiveness, the kitchen pantry offers a possible ritual around supplement-taking that "attach[es] more significance to a treatment—active or placebo—[that] may boost any beneficial effects that we feel."³⁴



Figure 4. In-progress kitchen pantry placebo station (left). Adapted kitchen pantry placebo station (right).

³³ Bone conductors are audio transducers that vibrate and can be heard only when attached to an object that resonates – such as a human skull or empty container. The vibrations of the bone conductors on the supplement containers also relate to the shaking step that occurs after dilution when making homeopathic medicines. ³⁴ Marchant, *Cure: A Journey Into the Science of Mind Over Body*.

¹⁵

The hypnotic client is also susceptible to the many inaccurate ideas about hypnosis presented in various media. Part of the hypnotist's introductory talk involves dispelling myths and rumors about hypnotism generated by popular culture. Some of the regular introductory points the hypnotist makes include "you are not asleep, you are not a zombie, you will remain in total control of your mind." Sometimes this type of explanation can cause sessions to go poorly, because the warnings clash with the client's expectations of the hypnotic experience – that they will be unconscious or asleep, that the hypnotist has supernatural powers, etc. Learning that hypnosis is basically a guided relaxation can cause clients to give up faith in the power of suggestion to heal, leading to less successful sessions. In surveys given to people after they were hypnotized, many claimed to desire more esoteric methods and experiences.³⁵ My work aims to build new, exciting, and accessible hypnotic techniques.

Self-Hypnosis and Autosuggestion

The area of hypnosis where I focus my work is self-hypnosis, which can be traced back to the beginnings of the self-help movement in the 1920s. Pharmacist-turned-hypnotist Émile Coué wanted to simplify the hypnotic process to make it available to more people.³⁶ Coué noticed how people seeking hypnotic intervention

³⁵ Antonio Capafons, "Rapid Self-Hypnosis: A Suggestion Method for Self Control," Psicothema 10 no. 3 (1998): 571-581, accessed October 17, 2019, <u>http://www.psicothema.com/psicothema.asp?id=187</u>.

³⁶ Coué launched the American self-help movement with the help of others like A.B. Saliger, who in 1927 invented the Psycho-Phone. The classic American quick fix was the foundational idea of the movement, which promoted instant remedies requiring little to no effort by the user. My work *One Man Trance* can be seen as a critique of America's obsession with the quick fix because by layering my activities with self-

were more suggestible because of the fact they were seeking treatment,³⁷ and that it didn't matter what suggestions the hypnotist provided. Coué took the client's true desire to get better and used it as the foundation for a new type of self-hypnotism called "autosuggestion." After many experiments, Coué settled on the now famous words – "every day, in every way, I am getting better and better" – as the most all-

improvement.³⁸ Coué believed the phrase covered every issue and ailment, as well as every possible positive outcome a person could desire.

We teach through suggestion, but we learn from autosuggestion. Think about learning experiences you have had. How many times have you repeated something to yourself, or written notes in your own words? Repetition and writing are examples of learning through autosuggestion. Experimental theater artist Tim Crouch connects

programming opportunities, I require no extra time commitment or alteration to my daily schedule to improve in any area of life I desire. "Episode 701, Story 1: Psychophone," History Detectives, accessed April 26, 2020, <u>http://www-tc.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/static/media/transcripts/2011-05-19/701_psychophone.pdf</u>.

³⁷ Popular problems people seek to solve through hypnosis are smoking cessation, weight loss, allergy alleviation, and improved memory.

³⁸ Coué's autosuggestion method requires the user to repeat the above phrase ten times twice a day, once in the morning upon waking up and the other in the evening before going to sleep. These times are also known as the hypnopompic and hypnagogic states, states when we are naturally more suggestible because our conscious mind has eased its restrictions on logical thought. In order for the user not to lose count of the sayings, Coué recommended knotting a string in ten places and passing the knots between the thumb and index finger until there are no more knots. In order to maximize the results, the user must deeply believe and wish to be in the process of self-improvement. But, Coué stressed, the user must also not try too hard to force results — as the more effort put into autosuggestion, the harder it is for the mind to make the suggestion a part of the self. Émile Coué, *Self Mastery through Conscious Autosuggestion* (Oxford: Allen & Unwin, 1926), Kindle edition.

autosuggestion with conceptual art.³⁹ Crouch writes that "autosuggestion is an instrument we are born with and which we play with all our life like a baby plays with a rattle."⁴⁰ Just as a baby plays with what it is given, we repeat things that have been told to us throughout our lives. These can be positive or negative thoughts, but they shape our character and determine what similar beliefs will be allowed to accompany them. Autosuggestion and hypnosis are ways to change the thoughts we repeat to ourselves and what we deem as acceptable to our concept of self.⁴¹

³⁹ One conceptual artist Crouch connects with autosuggestion is Marcel Duchamp. Crouch believes autosuggestion is like Duchamp's term "anti-retinal," meaning the mind's eye is more powerful than the visual spectacle. To combat retinal art, Duchamp selected and modified manufactured objects and called them "readymades." An example of a readymade is Duchamp's "Fountain," a porcelain urinal placed wall side down and signed, "R. Mutt 1917." Duchamp was also a member of the Oulipo, which will be discussed shortly. Seda Ilter, "'A Process of Transformation': Tim Crouch on *My Arm*," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21, no. 4 (November 2011): 394–404, accessed April 11, 2019, doi:<u>10.1080/10486801.2011.610792</u>. Gavin Parkinson, *The Duchamp Book* (London: Tate, 2008), 61.

⁴⁰ Tim Crouch, "The Art of Autosuggestion," TEDx Talk, November 2017, <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pb11GYJ7wY.</u>

⁴¹ Coué is also known for his seven laws of the mind, one of which is "an engaged imagination repudiates the will and dominates the conscious processes of the everyday." For Coué, the imagination is the subconscious, and the will is the rational mind. In my work, engaging the imagination by scoring everyday gestures leads to an alteration of the habitual processes of the mind by giving them a new expressive purpose. Only small adaptations in effort are required to successfully program yourself by interacting with some of my pieces. Since the suggestion scripts are paired with activities we already consider automatic, the act of accepting suggestions becomes more likely as muscle memory gets paired with suggestions through conditioning. Lindsay B. Yeates, "Émile Coué and His Method (II): Hypnotism, Suggestion, Ego Strengthening, and Autosuggestion," *Australian Journal of Clinical Hypnotherapy and Hypnosis* 38(1) (2016): 28-54, accessed January 24, 2020, http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&gathStat Tab=true&ct=display&fn=search&doc=ETOCRN608047797&indx=1&recIds=ETO CRN608047797.



Figure 5. Bedroom smart mirror (left). Nail clippers (right) with pinch sensor to trigger new text in smart mirror.

Bedroom Smart Mirror and Nail Clippers

One of my favorite activities is laying on my bed and picking at my nails and calluses from playing guitar and weightlifting. In the bedroom smart mirror and nail clippers area of the installation, a viewer can lie down and watch a sporting event on the main TV. When the viewer gets tired of lying in that direction, they can turn in the opposite direction and face the wall, where a small smart mirror displays a reflection of the television, as well as summarized versions of whiteboard writings (fig. 5 left). The handwritten text in the smart mirror can be controlled by pinching the nail clippers together (fig. 5 right), either on the viewer's nails/fingers or on nothing – just providing the action of the snip changes the text. In my own process, I use the nail clippers for keeping count like prayer beads, saying Coué's "every day in

every way I'm getting better and better" autosuggestion as I review the summary of my own work.



Figure 6. Subject under traditional relaxational hypnosis (left). Subject under activealert hypnosis (right). From a study by Éva Bányai (see below).

Active-alert Hypnosis

A common misconception people have about hypnosis is that it only works when seated and relaxed in a chair. According to a study conducted in the 1970s by Ernest Hilgard and Éva Bányai,⁴² hypnosis can be done on active and alert people while their eyes are open. These psychologists put subjects into a hypnotic state while they were on exercise bikes and while they were relaxed in a chair and compared the

⁴² Éva Bányai and Ernest R. Hilgard. "A Comparison of Active-Alert Hypnotic Induction with Traditional Relaxation Induction," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 85 (2) (1976): 218–24, accessed January 6, 2020, doi:<u>10.1037/0021-843X.85.2.218</u>.

results (fig. 6).⁴³ The hypnotists read the same hypnotic induction script for both the active and relaxed sessions, except the words "relaxation and drowsiness" were switched with "activity and alertness." Hilgard and Bányai found that through the active-alert hypnotic induction procedure, "it is possible to induce a state in which all the important characteristics of hypnosis occur, except the resemblance of sleep."⁴⁴ In a separate study by Bányai, it was even found that imaginary movements can be just as powerful as real movements in the active-alert hypnosis approach. The participant can be in any bodily position and the hypnotist can suggest they imagine they are sitting on a bicycle and pedaling rhythmically, and it will have the same results.⁴⁵ The more a person goes into a hypnotic state, the easier it will be for them to reach that level of hypnosis and go even deeper the next time.⁴⁶ In my work, daily habits and activities are a great tool for self-hypnosis because of their repeated performance, gradually increasing the depth of the hypnotic state reached and increasing the potential for successful self-suggestion.

⁴³ Bányai's and Hilgard's study aimed to expand the body of evidence on "the possibility of inducing hypnotic-like altered states of consciousness by maneuvers designed to increase tension, alertness, and physical activity rather than by relaxation and sleepiness" (Ibid., 218).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁵ Éva Bányai, "Active-Alert Hypnosis: History, Research, and Applications," *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, no. 2 (2018): 88, accessed January 8, 2020, doi:<u>10.1080/00029157.2018.1496318</u>.

⁴⁶ Marlene Hunter, *Creative Scripts for Hypnotherapy* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1994), 5.



Figure 7. Bedroom one-man band self-hypnosis station screens.

Bedroom One-Man Band Self-Hypnosis Station

The one-man band⁴⁷ self-hypnosis station in the bedroom is designed for active-alert self-hypnosis using the stereotypic man-cave, home-theater, multi-screen setup (fig. 7). There are four television screens, plus one whiteboard for projection. The center TV continuously plays a live sporting event,⁴⁸ while the other TVs display hypnotic text, dreams, or notes to review. Instead of pedaling on a bike, viewers can sit on the drum throne in the installation and push down on the double-bass drum pedals rhythmically (the ones with the red dots in fig. 8). The action causes single words to play on the different screens, similar to how the Spritz speed-reading app

⁴⁷ "The one man band is a triumph of the human spirit over the physical and mental challenges of playing several instruments simultaneously." Dave Harris, *Head, Hands, & Feet: A Book of One Man Bands* (self-pub: Canada, 2012), 6.

⁴⁸ Since sports are currently cancelled due to COVID-19, I usually stream archived full NFL games through the NFL Game Pass app, which was recently made free through the end of May without requiring a credit card number.

works.⁴⁹ Each screen plays back text from different sources. The main screen plays back my active-alert hypnosis induction script followed by different suggestion scripts for self-programming, such as creativity enhancement, wealth and abundance, and others. Another screen plays back my daily work notes word by word, in order to keep the ideas I am working on currently and have worked on in the past fresh in my mind. Another screen plays back my dream journals word by word, so I can keep dream signs and themes in conscious awareness. At the bottom of each screen the title of the script, dream, or date of journal is displayed. The pedals on either side of the central double-bass drum pedals control the visual projection playback of the whiteboard created and saved earlier that day. The far right pedal advances the whiteboard one frame forward. The far left pedal advances the whiteboard one frame backwards.

⁴⁹ Spritz is a reading app for your smartphone or web browser that displays one word of a text document or HTML website at a time with the ability to set the rate at which the words in the document are displayed. Displaying one word at a time is also called Rapid Serial Visual Presentation. You are able to fix your eyes in one position instead of moving them across lines of text. Simone Benedetto et al., "Rapid Serial Visual Presentation in Reading: The Case of Spritz," *Computers in Human Behavior* 45 (April) (2015): 352–58, accessed November 17, 2019, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.043.



Figure 8. Bedroom one-man band self-hypnosis station pedals.

The whiteboard projection is played back in short chunks of text or drawings, as opposed to the single words on the TV screens, because the pedals controlling the whiteboard projection are hit less often, allowing more time to read more words. Because the bedroom whiteboard is 8 feet x 4 feet, it provides the most opportunity for analysis, categorization, and summary sections (fig. 1). During a daily performance in the bedroom, I might write the text on the main whiteboard, and if it excites me and I feel like it could be pulled out and carried around in my subconscious, I copy it to the smaller vertical whiteboard on the side. This way, I create a more detailed description that can be triggered and played back separately from the main screen in an aspect ratio that fits the bedroom and bathroom smart mirrors. I also type these new developments into a computer document that I later turn into one-word slides to review in my one-man band daily performance.

Multitasking

Active-alert hypnosis and one-man band rigs involve multitasking, the ability to perform more than one task simultaneously. Multitasking can be confused with performing one task while distracted doing another. Looking at the effort involved in consuming other types of entertainment can shed light on forces that lead to mass distraction. The advent of smartphones is an example. People are always looking at them, even while they are driving or at the movie theater. 3D televisions have had difficulty catching on because the 3D glasses that viewers must wear affect the ability to see other screens clearly.⁵⁰ People would rather be on their phones and laptops while watching TV than give all their attention to a 3D film. I transfer this desire to multitask while watching TV to the process of reading and listening. In my work, each multitasking effort is equal in value, requiring the same amount of attention, and yielding greater results than conventional multitasking, which involves both attention and distraction. Sometimes in my work, a small physical gesture can cause words, written or spoken, to appear one at a time on a screen, projected on a wall, in a smart mirror, or played through a speaker.

The Spritz-style rapid serial visual presentation can also be connected to the eye-fixation involved in hypnosis. Eye-fixation in hypnosis involves focusing on one point as you lower yourself into a trance-like state. Usually the eyes are fixated on a wall, a finger, or the upper eyelids as the eyes are rolled back. Interestingly, when in a state of hypnosis, people usually move their eyes in a motion called saccadic eye

⁵⁰ Jenny Preece et al., *Interaction Design: Beyond Human-Computer Interaction* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2015), 40-41.

movement. This involves moving the eyes back and forth from side to side, almost like eye movement patterns under the eyelids during REM sleep. Eye saccades are also a technique used for speed-reading. Instead of scanning a line of text in a linear manner, the reader views groups of words and then jumps to the next group. In my bedroom station, the 3 TV screens around the main TV play back different text, causing the eyes to bounce in saccades from moving text window to moving text window, in a way similar to being in a state of hypnosis.

Ergodic Effort

Just as there is active-alert hypnosis (often referred to simply as active hypnosis), there is passive hypnosis, which can be defined as entering into a hypnotic state through progressive relaxation. And just as there is active and passive hypnosis, there is also active and passive reading, an everyday activity that can overlap with hypnosis. Regular literature, written to be read in a manner requiring trivial movements of the reader's eyes and hands, is considered to be nonergodic and passive. In ergodic literature, reading is more active because "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text."⁵¹ This active effort can range from flipping the book upside down and reading in the opposite direction every eight pages, as required in *Only Revolutions* by Mark Danielewski, to making the reader choose their own path through a Borgesian labyrinth.⁵² In my work, ergodic effort is required to access the text or audio of any of the pieces in the installation. In the

⁵¹ Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 1.

⁵² Mark Danielewski, Only Revolutions (New York: Pantheon, 2006).

ergodic media I create, even trivial effort can become nontrivial when paired with text or audio and directed toward a specific goal.



Figure 9. In-progress bathroom vanity self-hypnosis station (left). Adapted bathroom vanity self-hypnosis station (right).

Bathroom Vanity Self-Hypnosis Station

An example of non-trivial effort in my work can be seen in the bathroom vanity self-hypnosis station (fig. 9). The user stands in front of the smart mirror and uses hand sanitizer. The user can watch a video of me performing the piece, or reference a short instruction sheet displayed next to the mirror that explains the interactivity being offered to the viewer at this station. As the user is using the hand sanitizer, they are to tap out the syllables of a simple tune, "The ABC" song, with their knees against the triggers mounted on the vanity cabinet.⁵³ This movement activates both the visual replay of notes in the smart mirror, and the audio of the hypnotist's voice speaking one syllable per trigger of a hypnotic script about cleanliness and boosting immune system power.⁵⁴ The 43 taps required to complete the song also equates with the 30 seconds of rubbing in hand sanitizer that doctors recommend for best results. In order for text to appear, the user must engage in a knee-bending, hip-shifting movement. The act of using hand sanitizer while standing in front of a sink acts as a placebo or suggestion, enhancing our mental expectations of using the hand sanitizer, making us feel and think we are cleaner. Viewers can then use this heightened sense of cleanliness to help their bodies fight off the Coronavirus and other dangerous pathogens.

⁵³ Doug Engelbart, the inventor of the computer mouse, also pioneered mouse alternatives in the 1960s such as foot pedal and knee devices. "Mouse Alternatives," Doug Engelbart Institute, accessed March 2, 2020, https://www.dougengelbart.org/content/view/162/#Mouse-Alternatives.

⁵⁴ The smart mirror content made from digitized versions of my vertical summary whiteboards may remind viewers of the graphic outlay in the work of cartoonist Lynda Barry. Barry, a recent MacArthur Fellow and Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Creativity at the University of Wisconsin, fills composition notebook pages with busy combinations of drawings, text, and frames. In her most recent work *Making Comics*, Barry guides the reader through different exercises in accessing their creativity and drawing comics. Each page is overflowing with information, which is how I want my smart mirrors to be experienced. During my performances, some of the smart mirror content would have been goal specific (cleanliness, strength, creativity, etc.), linking thematically to the hypnotic audio that was playing, so the text and drawings would have acted as a guide just as Barry's recent books do. Barry is interested in the connection between drawing and writing, an area I plan to pursue in my whiteboard-making research in the future. Lynda Barry, *Making Comics* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2019).

Oulipian Constraints

Similar to reading, there is also active and passive writing – the former being a way to keep yourself within certain constraints while writing.⁵⁵ The Oulipo⁵⁶ is a group of French writers and mathematicians who in the 1960s began developing constrained writing techniques. Their generative writing algorithms opened new avenues of creativity and new shapes and forms of literature. An example of an Oulipian work is *A Void* by Georges Perec, a 2005 novel for which the constraints were to write 300 pages without using the letter "e."⁵⁷ Oulipians claim constraints help writing to flow more freely because of the overall pattern or rule for the work.

Consider the constraints of necessity that we deal with in our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, we perform the same actions so many times they become automatic. Most of us must walk, drive, talk, eat, sleep, brush our teeth, open doors, etc., often performing these routines in the same spaces daily. In my work, I consider

⁵⁵ I consider passive writing to be any writing that occurs without constraint. Paper size, margins, typing speed, dictation software accuracy all might have begun as constraints, but because they are part of how we learned to write, they cannot be considered as constraints.

⁵⁶ OuLiPo is an acronym for Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, or Workshop for Potential Literature. Daniel Levin Becker, *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 116. Kindle edition.

⁵⁷ Another of Perec's novels, *Life A User's Manual*, uses the outside structure of a Paris apartment building and the knight's tour chess maneuver to bounce from room, to lobby, to stairwell in order to create the narrative. The Knight's Tour chess maneuver involves moving the Knight to every square on the chessboard without landing on the same square twice. This Oulipian formula generated the overall structure and narrative arc for the novel. Georges Perec, *A Void*, trans. Gilbert Adair (Boston: Verba Mundi, 2005). Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, trans. David Bellos (Boston: Verba Mundi, 2016). David Bellos, "Mathematics, Poetry, Fiction: The Adventure of the Oulipo," *BSHM Bulletin: Journal of the British Society for the History of Mathematics* 25 (2) (2010): 104–18, accessed April 14, 2018, doi:10.1080/17498430903489237.

what we can also "write" in those banal spaces, be it text or sound. I am interested in new Oulipian constraints like discovering how many chews it takes for me to eat a protein bar, and then composing text, sound, or animations to score that exact number of chews. Or finding the number of knee taps that precisely accompany measuring out 40 grams of oatmeal in the morning and evenings, and then writing a specific suggestion, like how oatmeal is a superfood, to play back as audio while standing at the kitchen island making oatmeal. All of these pieces take advantage of my met/met super suggestibility, priming my body to use itself better. I can write and perform my own hypnotic scripts, stories, and songs through everyday necessary gestures, giving them a new expressive purpose.



Figure 10. Adapted projection on wall exercise bike self-hypnosis station.

Exercise Bike Self-Hypnosis Station

An example of Oulipian constraints in my work can be seen in the exercise bike self-hypnosis station (fig. 10). Hypnotic text is projected onto the wall one word at a time. The text is right-aligned instead of centered like the text on the TV screens in the bedroom. The right-alignment creates space for a series of photos, which I took during my personal body transformation project I pursued while working on my M.F.A. thesis project, to be played back along with the hypnotic text.⁵⁸ The Oulipian constraint is that I required myself to match the number of words in the text to the number of photos from each angle to create the perfect cycle of both. Since I took a new photo of my body every week, the script was rewritten every week to become

⁵⁸ U.S. artist Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 1972, consists of 148 black-and-white photographs of the artist's loss of 10 pounds over a 37-day period. Photographs were taken each morning from four separate positions. The photographs are displayed vertically, according to the day they were taken, and spread horizontally on a wall. Similarly, contemporary weight-loss and muscle-gaining regimens recommend tracking bodily development through photographs. The muscle-building routine I follow – from the book *Bigger, Leaner, Stronger* – recommends taking photos every Monday morning, which I did starting in September 2019, resulting in 93 photos taken from three separate positions in my bathroom mirror. My photos track a 40-pound weight gain during a "bulk" (a bodybuilding term for gaining muscle and fat) and then a 30-pound weight loss during a "cut" (losing fat while maintaining muscle mass). In my exercise bike self-hypnosis station, the photos are displayed vertically by day, like Antin's, except in three Picture-in-Picture screens to the left of the hypnotic text projection. Just as Antin's photos resemble a film strip, with each knee trigger on the exercise bike, my photos seem to animate as they advance to the next picture in that position. Antin's *Carving* addresses female expectations as my exercise bike station addresses male expectations. People that are hypnotizable are seen as weak-minded. In many respects, bodybuilders are also thought to be weak-minded. By pairing reading, exercising, and my body-tracking photos, I am carving out a strong, new, multi-tasking male. "Carving: A Traditional Sculpture," Art Institute of Chicago, accessed April 2, 2020, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/144356/carving-a-traditional-sculpture. Michael Matthews, Bigger, Leaner, Stronger (Clearwater: Oculus, 2014), Kindle edition.

one word longer. Usually the script was rewritten entirely, incorporating new ideas generated while making or reviewing whiteboard content in the other self-hypnosis stations.⁵⁹ On the exercise bike, the knees are used to trigger the changes in the slides by bumping up against the padded handlebars. Viewers can cycle through my bodily history while viewing my most recent active-alert induction scripts, subconsciously motivating themselves as viewers.

Future Work

My work involves inventing ways to trigger audio/visuals during our everyday activities that can potentiate the goal of an activity as well as layer it with a new purpose. New concepts in science often find their earliest expression in the art world because the latter encourages interdisciplinary imaginative thinking rather than specialization. My ideas are more likely to be accepted in the art world than at the National Guild of Hypnotists Annual Convention and Educational Conference – though I do plan on applying next year to set up my own booth/exhibition to test this theory. With this M.F.A., I can continue following my interests and avenues toward self-improvement, showing work in galleries or my own hypnotist office.

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