Critical Evaluation: Masters Project
Vaida Kaklauskaite and Amy Read: Digital Arts MA

Blogs:

www.amyreaddesigns.com/mablog

www.vaidakaklauskaite.com

http://vaidaandamy.wordpress.com

Introduction:

During the Masters Project we wanted to carry on the theme from our previous works of distorting the body. Specifically we want to challenge the current content of fashion imagery.

In our Masters Proposal we set out three ways in which we wanted to push our established collaboration. The first was to introduce a new collaborative partner, the second was to move into experimenting with animated GIFs and moving image and the third was to focus on the context of the work in a professional setting.

Collaborative work from MSN4

Inspiration: Reed + Radar:

(Reed + Radar, 2011)

When researching Reed + Radar we asked what does the movement add to the images? We felt that the disjointed and exagerated movements added a playfullness to the work, but it does not add anything to the clothes themselves. It doesn't express a texture or weight nor does it convey any meaningful emotion. We want to explore this use of movement in terms of highlighting an idea, or emotion or quality of the garment itself.

Context Inspiration: Online Magazines:

In September 2010 Vogue Hommes Japan broke away from print tradition and published their first digital edition. It was made entriely from black and white GIFs. This works in opposition to everything that print publication stands for. Print publication requires large, high quality photographic files, but this iPad app is only 283 mb in total. There is an opportunity to mix still and moving image and everything in between. On online magazines, cinemagraphs can be used to provide moving content without the massive file sizes that video creates.

Key Points In The Unit:

At the beginning of the unit we were initially inspired by the work of Zach Gold, and how his fashion films were hybrids of clean fashion imagery and emotional, narrative based imagery. We were particularly interested in the non-narcissistic element of his work, the model is acting emotions and as a result lost the self reflective nature of the model watching herself being watched (Berger, 1972: 47).

Avoiding this narcissistic type of imagery has been very important to us throughout the unit and we have tried to capture emotions and narratives rather than poses.

We began our journey from still to moving imagery with a method close to our original working method, capturing stills with a DSLR and flash lighting. We found we couldn't shoot images quick enough to create a smooth movement. During the shoot we also found that if we are using simple pieces of fabric to extend the body we cannot include normal clothing. This detracts from the fabric far too much. The shots of the male model, who is topless, are much more successful in focusing the viewer on the movement of the fabric in relation to the body.

It was at this point in the unit that an important question was asked – what happens if our extensions are something solid, something with structure? With the work of Lucy & Bart in mind we used modeling clay to make small bobbles (see blogs) that we used to extend parts of the body by sticking them to the skin (Lucy and Bart 2008). This meant the shape of the body played a bigger part in the extension. The most successful image of this shoot was when we placed the bobbles along the curve of the spine. We found by using simple movements the extensions and contortions of the body became the focus. This changed the work dramatically, and took us further away from the fashion element of our original content. However we learnt that by using simple movements, and structured extensions we could draw the audience to a particular part of the body. We then used this form of body extension to experiment with video, however we quickly found that the video produced a 'reality' that took something away from the work, it became more visceral, it became uncomfortable to watch and maybe even grotesque. We felt this was a digression away from our end goal, which is to challenge the current content of fashion imagery.

At this point we started researching cinemagraphs, a technique by which you take video footage and use Photoshop to create high quality GIFs with smoother movement than a standard animated GIF. We felt this was an interesting process that sat between still and moving image, and would be contextually appropriate to online fashion magazines and blogs. To test out this technique we decided once again to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone and shoot on location. This provided a huge amount of context for the viewer to read into, and provided narrative questions for the viewer. Why is she there? Who is she? Our most successful cinemagraph created questions and discussion by leaving room for the viewer to interpret it. It asked questions such as, is this a religious covering? If not why is she covered? The landscape was evocative of another place, another country, which added to this mystery.

However, we felt that we were not trying to express issues surrounding religion, or the role of women within those religions, and at this point we felt as though we needed the input of another collaborator to push our work forward. We needed a fashion designer to bring their skills and inspirations to the project to bring the fashion element to the imagery.
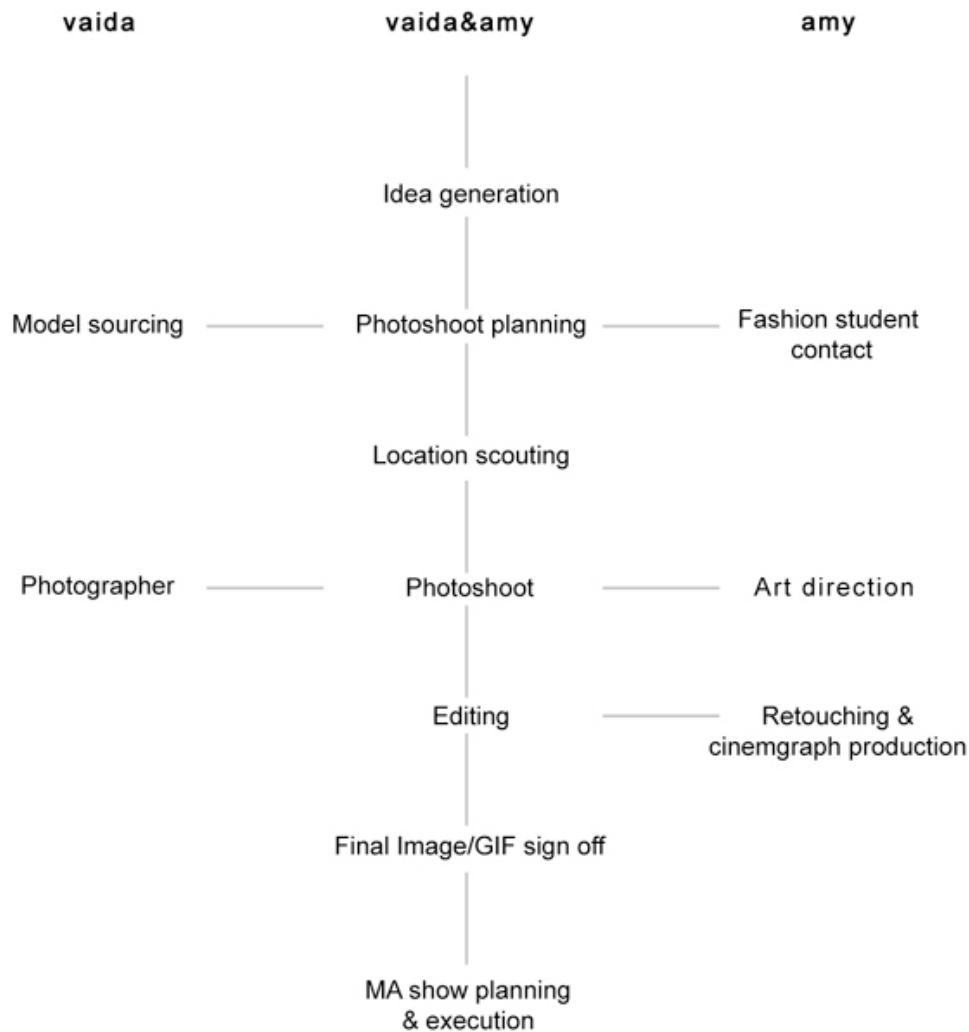
Collaboration & Alicja M Kurek:

We have continued our collaborative roles from previous projects, but as our collaboration expanded in this unit we have both taken on extra roles to support this, as well as welcoming another collaborator into the project. Vaida has been the photographer, and model booker. Amy has been the art director, post-production and fashion student contact. We also have shared roles that include generating ideas together through conversation and research, planning photo shoots, location scouting, editing the images/footage, picking final work and planning of the MA exhibition. We do not simply share the same interests; there is a conversation at every stage of the project, and a complete integration of both of our skills, which is essential for a successful collaboration (John-Steiner, V. 2000: 64).

During this unit we took a risk in introducing a new collaborative partner into our already established collaboration – a 1st year Fashion BA student from NUCA. When we first met with Alicja, we talked about the level of collaboration we were looking for and made it clear that we didn't want to over direct her, we are interested in seeing what other collaborators would bring to our work.

We set very few criteria for Alicja, as we wanted her work to have an influence on the final outcome, to integrate her influences into the collaboration as much as possible. The criteria was that there had to be movement in the garment so the fabric could not be skin tight or too structured and the material couldn't be too heavy.

Alicja had some clear criteria of her own that influenced the outcome of the project. Her main concern was that she didn't want the dress to become a costume piece, as it had visual similarities to a red riding hood type cloak, her suggestion here was to avoid locations within woods, and dark rich browns or greens in the colour palette. We also discussed a beach location; we all thought that a harsh, rocky beach location would contrast well with the delicate fabric.

Alicja had also used the dress to explore "the conflict between historically masculine sport clothing and femininity." (Kurek, 2011). Certain elements such as the masculine chunky zip and the racer back work in opposition to the feminine detail on the front of the dress and the soft curves that the asymmetric cut creates.

```
         vaida                vaida&amy                amy


                            Idea generation


   Model sourcing ——— Photoshoot planning ———   Fashion student
                                                    contact


                            Location scouting


   Photographer  ———      Photoshoot      ———    Art direction


                              Editing       ———  Retouching &
                                                 cinemgraph production


                        Final Image/GIF sign off


                          MA show planning
                            & execution
```

Final Shoot:

We took inspiration from Alicja and the garment itself when planning the final shoot. We wanted to carry on exploring the extension of the body through fabric, and after conducting a test shoot with the dress we found that it created an interesting contrast between masculine and feminine lines. The front of the dress is very sexual and could be read as symbolic of female genatalia, the front is also longer than the back, which creates a beautiful 'S' shape when viewed in profile. This extends the typically female lines of the body, the curves around the stomach. In contrast the racer back pattern and the chunky zip are masculine, the exposed shoulders appear broad, and the long lean lines of the model's legs are static compared with the billowing fabric.

Editing Down The Footage:

Backgrounds:

We chose the cliff edge for its strong texture and hard appearance, but in some shots the background over powered the model. For example in the following image the model and dress is almost absorbed into the rock, the rock is the most prominent subject.

Colour:

We felt that the colour of the cliffs is overpowering the dress in the following image. This was something that originally attracted us to Hunstanton, but we feel it takes away from the form of the dress. The colours are also very bright, and commercial, and we felt that the dress was being lost in the background. One of the main focuses had to be the form of the dress and we felt this was lost in the colour GIFs.

Black and White:

In contrast to the colour images, the form of the dress is the most prominent element of the black and white GIFs. This allows the viewer to be drawn to the movement of the dress first, before taking in the rest of the GIF.

Smoke:

We had originally wanted to use smoke in our cinmegraphs to experiment with the possibility of the dress being static. However we felt this was actually too much, it is distracting, and takes focus away from the dress. The smoke was also overpowered by the location.

Body Positions:

Due to shooting in a rocky location, we had to be careful about the tension in the body coming through in the final edit. For example the image below is uncomfortable to look at, you can sense how unbalanced the model is, and how tense she is trying to hold the position.

Final Edit:

In total we have chosen two GIFs that we will be sending to online fashion magazines and blogs to promote our collaborative work. When editing down the footage we were looking for some specific elements –

1. The dress itself should be distorting the body, and producing more feminine lines.

2. The dress and model must be the focus of the image, not the surrounding rocks and cliffs.

3. The background must contrast with dress without stealing focus. For example the sharp rocks contrast with the soft and delicate fabric.

4. The model must not be 'posing' in a narcissistic manner. By this we mean she should be in a stance appropriate to the movement of the dress, as opposed to being a clothes hanger for the dress.

We feel our final two cinemagraphs express our intended message. We are challenging the current content of fashion imagery by using the fashion item to distort the body. We are also distorting the typical fashion body, which is male in shape, into more feminine shapes with the dress.

Feedback From Alicja M Kurek On The Final Cinemagraphs (Kurek, 2011):

The overall feedback from Alicja was positive, but there were some differences between her vision and our final outcome. We feel that this may have been down to the type of collaboration we had with Alicja. We were happy to include Alicja as a fully integrated collaborative partner, meaning her skills, ideas and inspirations had an influence on every part of our project however this requires a large amount of time and energy. We have a very intense collaborative relationship that we think is difficult for other people to match. In the end we feel Alicja's collaborative role was a complimentary one, meaning her skills and ideas were needed to push our work forward but ultimately the end creative decisions were down to us.

Final Dissemination Context:

The ideal context for this work is online fashion magazines such as i-D (see image below), Another Magazine, Dazed Digital and Wound Magazine. This context is all about being browser and device compatible as well as having small file sizes. As online readership takes over paper-based publications, fashion is moving into film and GIFs. However we also feel that the cinemagraphs would be ideal for devices such as iPhone apps and iPad apps, and there is scope to develop this aspect especially as these devices do not play flash files, and will struggle with a large .mov file. The cinemagraphs could easily be scaled down to fill the screen of an iPhone/iPad, and then distributed through iTunes to a global market, through a fashion magazine app such as Vogue.

Through our tests for the MA exhibition, we have also found that because the original source material is of high quality the cinemagraphs can be shown on a larger scale when file size is no longer an issue. This could be applied to LCD billboards or TV advertising to reach a greater audience beyond the audience of a fashion magazine.

One of our goals was to be able to approach new collaborators with the work we have produced. We got in contact with http://shhhhblog.tumblr.com/ to see if they would be interested in featuring our work on their blog, but instead they are interested in creating a cinemagraph look book with us for their new collection.
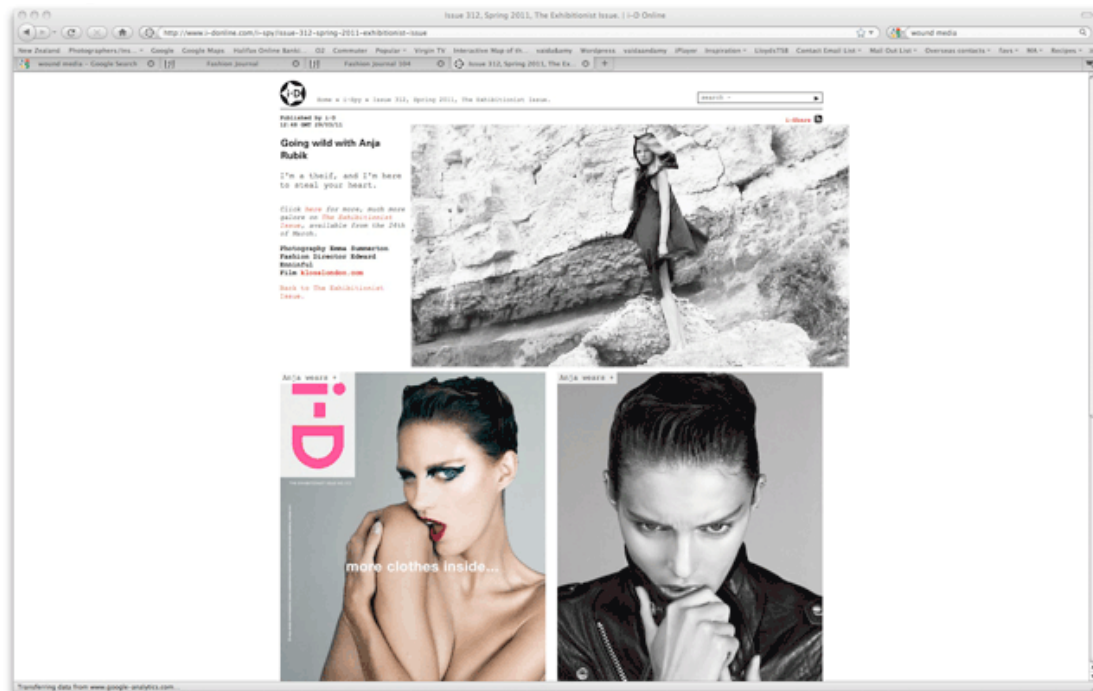
MA Exhibition:

For our exhibition we had to carefully think about our original context and how we could adapt this to make it suitable for the exhibition. With our original context being online fashion magazines we can safely assume that the viewers will have some knowledge of fashion and issues surrounding body image. We cannot assume this of our audience at the MA exhibition. Therefore we have to make the images relatable in another way – scale (Newman, 2007, p.53).

This will enhance the viewers ability to view the model's body in relation to their own, to enhance the model's long, lean lines being heavily contrasted with the billowing, feminine curves of the dress. Projection is the best way to achieve the scale we need. We did have the option of appearing on the collective show reel, which will

also be a large projection but we felt that our work wouldn't fit with the other work from our course, as the range is so diverse. We opted to use a projection room with our work isolated so that the viewer would be able to view the work separately from the rest of the show, and focus on the large amount of detail that projection provides.

Original Intentions and Final Outcomes:

We feel that by setting ourselves the three main goals in our Masters Proposal we had a clear focus throughout the unit. Our new work has already enabled us to start working as part of a new collaborative team, http://shhhblog.tumblr.com/, and we hope to carry on our collaborative work professionally.

Bibliography:

Berger, John. (1972) Ways of Seeing, Penguin, p.47

John-Steiner, Vera. (2000), Oxford university Press, p. 64

Kurek, Alicja M, Artist Profile 2011, Available from <http://www.amyreaddesigns.com:/mablog/?page_id=2464>

Kurek, Alicja M, 2011, [Interview by email 15 August 2011] Available from <http://www.amyreaddesigns.com:/mablog/?page_id=2469>

Lucy McRae and Bart Hess <http://lucyandbart.blogspot.com/> [Accessed February 2011]

Newman, M (2007) Jeff Wall: works and collected writings, Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, p. 53

Reed + Rader, <http://www.reedandrader.com/> [Accessed June 2011]

Vogue Hommes Japan (2010), Available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/vogue-hommes-japan-digital/id391890810?mt=8>, [Accessed December 2010]

Additional Resources:

Alexander McQueen <http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/>

Dazed and Confused <http://www.dazeddigital.com/> [Accessed January 2011]

Fashion gone rouge <http://fashiongonerogue.com> [Accessed July 2011]

Herb Ritts <http://www.herbritts.com/> [Accessed December 2010]

I-D magazine <http://i-donline.com/> [Accessed January 2011]

Jamie Beck http://fromme-toyou.tumblr.com/ [Accessed June 2011]

Jan Mansy <http://www.janmasny.com/index.html> [Accessed December 2010]

Mert and Marcus <http://www.mertandmarcus.com/> [Accessed January 2011]

Nick Knight, <http://nickknight.com/> [Accessed April 2011]

Ollie and Capaldi <http://win.the-aop.org/IF10/SD_memlist_full.asp?id=05062&n=+OLLIE+%26+CAPALDI&x=&w=www.ollieandcapaldi.com&s=mail&number=10> [Accessed March 2011]

Pierre Debusschere <http://www.pierredebusschere.com/> [Accessed February 2011]

Shirin Neshat, Art in Exile, 2010 <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/lang/eng//id/1154> [Accessed July 2011]

Zach Gold, <http://www.zachgold.com/> [Accessed January 2011]