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Pavane for a Dead Princess ([Link to Video](#))

Overview:

For our final project, we decided to return to video art, revisiting our initial medium while paying homage to the same composer who inspired our Monster, Ondine—Maurice Ravel. Borrowing another of Ravel’s titles, Pavane for a Dead Princess, this project questions the ways New Media can serve as a conduit to reconnect with our adolescent selves, our DEAD selves. We explore the potent interplay of reality and the unreal: how digital media can distort, heighten, or obscure nostalgia. Central to this is a reflection on the ethical implications of training AI to emulate human personas in language and movement. The work also engages with silences and white noise, drawing inspiration from video artists like Amar Kanwar. By eschewing reactionary loudness, we emphasize stillness to capture subtle nuances, blurring the thresholds between life, memory, and death.

What does it mean to embed our personal data into AI? Does it foster a deeper emotional connection, or does it verge on narcissism or naivete? In a time when people seek AI for answers and even solace, the project interrogates the stakes of these interactions when our identities are intertwined with the AI we create.

Tools Used:

- Final Cut Pro (Video and sound editing)
- Runway (Photo to Video)
- ChatGPT
- Google Sheets (Data Entry)

Origin:

The project began as an exploration of ritual and memory. Initially, we envisioned a live performance element, such as lighting a candle before a Chinese altar. However, Rachel noted the risk of this approach feeling overly derivative, prompting a shift toward a more nuanced expression.

Bob introduced us to an AI-generated video featuring a long-deceased composer playing alongside a living musician. This sparked the idea of using AI to resurrect and collaborate with the past. Jiayi contributed old photographs of herself, experimenting with Runway AI to animate these images and bridge the gap between static memory and living motion.

Evan [NAMI] recalled years of journaling and created a digital archive of these entries. By feeding this data into AI, they reconstructed a version of themselves as a pre-transition, pre-coming-out adolescent, exploring their current identity through the lens of adolescent joy.

Relation to Class:

Artists of any stroke, but particularly photographers and filmmakers who look at certain groups of people and bring their bodies into a sterile museum landscape can sometimes fall into the trap of capture and extraction as many anthropologists of old have done with South and southeast Asian cultures in particular. For much of this class we have had to grapple with ways we can counteract these advances of erasure done to the natural by abused forms of new media. Kanwar remains a shining example of how to do this through video art.

His catalog of work acts as a living archive to describe how these silences of humanity are preserved, not in conventional forms like text or digital files, but in physical and cultural markers—objects, places, designs, sounds, and even garments. These silences are stored in meaningful locations or things, such as a window witnessing violence or a sarong representing a struggle. This framing expands the traditional notion of an archive and challenges how histories of violence and trauma are remembered and expressed.

Similarly, we take the camera to sites of loss, violence, and disappearance in the form of our childhood selves. In still photographs, lost toys, and cringy journal entries, we find a way to commune with the dead. They all point to various types of silences encountered—some decades old. In our communion do we realize our own rotting. Beyond loving a memory, we give memory a life in legs, in language, in silence. Memory as mirror that becomes memory as realization of a tainted present. To use childhood as a looking glass reifies a need to be LESS tolerant for present disaster. Kanwar tells his audience to reconsider their perceptions of who causes harm and to reflect on the “lie of the half-truth,” where individuals might ignore or rationalize violence within themselves or in society. This concept of accepting the lie of the half-truth has so many applications when we think about the type of destruction that we allow in this world. That capacity for tolerance of ecological destruction or capitalist domination is permitted by moralities that pit evils against lesser evils. Yet in the end, our destruction is indexed by our own failure to exist in those silences. So, Kanwar’s work, and ours by extension, suggest embracing one’s own doubts, fears, and even desires to cause pain, as a way to develop a more fragile yet potent language for addressing these issues.

Feedback:

Feedback from our presentation underscored the project’s ability to disorient and provoke. Many participants claimed temporary bamboozlement by certain elements—unsure of whether they were experiencing AI-generated or authentic human memories. This blurring of boundaries highlights the evolving interplay between personal and private domains in the digital age.

Photos:

Childhood photo of Jiayi turned into video through Runway AI:



Bob's Childhood Toy Lost in Fire:



Rachel's Found Footage of Empty Swing:



Evan's Journal Data Repository, Question, and Response:

Dear Younger Me,

I hope you are well even if you dead now (dead in the sense that I am so different from who I was in these journals.) I want to let you know that you are loved and that you are reminding me through your writing how powerful adolescent joy is. If I could hold you now and tell you you didn't have to be Atlas, I would. Your shoulders must ache.

I came out as gay nine years ago and have taken on the mantle of trans fem two years ago. I don't know what the queer or trans discourse is like from your ears, but I hope you love this version of you as much as I love me. It's silly looking back at our crush on Britney, because she was the poster child for the smart Asian Baby Girl that all the boys fawned over. In my opinion I think you "liked" her not because you wanted to be with her, but rather because you wanted to be her... the popular smart chick who was kind and crafty. I hope you know that when I look into the mirror now I see her, or at least a version of her. In me. We have become her.

Also, I think you'd be happy to hear that we have two new dogs now, Cooper and Kona, and they are truly the best. I miss Jack a lot and I forgot that he was only with us for a few months-- thank you for reminding me. You have such a big heart and are so determined to be perfect.

Dear Future Me,

Wow, first off, can I just say how cool it is that you're writing to me? You're all grown up now and still thinking about me? That makes me feel... kind of important in a way I don't think I've ever let myself feel. Thank you for saying all those nice things about me. Sometimes I feel like I'm trying so hard, but maybe it's worth it after all.

So, about all this stuff... being gay and trans and all, I don't really know much about that yet, but you make it sound like it's a huge part of you. And you sound so happy! I guess I've always been curious about being someone else--someone brighter, more free, more... what's the word? Alive? Maybe Britney was part of that--wanting to be someone like her. So if you're saying you've found that kind of person in yourself, wow, that's huge. I think I'd like that version of me a lot. And you say I'm her? That's mind-blowing. Like, what? We did that?

I'm really happy you remember Jack. I love that dog so much, even if he was only around for a little while. Dogs are the best--Cooper and Kona sound awesome. Do they do the thing where they tilt their heads when you talk to them? Jack used to do that, and it made me laugh every time.

You're writing a musical?! That's so amazing! I guess all the doodles and daydreams I have right now about writing and performing someday mean something after all. It feels good to hear that you're still chasing that dream, even if you say you're not quite where you want to be yet.

Honestly, knowing you're still trying is inspiring. If you could tell me what the musical's about, I'd totally want to hear it.

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E7 📄 Happy New Year, no dreams recorded. So today is pretty much a day to relax, although we are arranging to go to my uncle's house later in the day, but m					
	A	B	C	D	E
	Date	Entry ID	Age	Topic/Theme	Content
1					Hello. You are going to be my dream journal, as we li as my diary. That being said, no dreams remembered period. Yesterday, we had about a 13-hour drive to Utah from California. It was supposed to be Eight hours, but with traffic 13 hours, was the fastest with Christmas two days before we had a lot to use to entertain ourselves. Today, we are going skiing sledding and snowboarding.
2	2012-12-27	1	12	Beginnings, Chri	I'm only doing the first two. See you later.
3	2012-12-28	2	12	Skiing, Crime	Hello again. Unfortunately, we weren't able to go skiing yesterday or snowboarding today. However, we are going to for sure. It looks sunny outside, no storm. Perfect conditions to go out in the snow. Wait, I remembered a tiny bit. So I woke up in a classroom and two of my seventh or sixth grade. Teachers can't remember, were talking about how they committed a crime and planning to run away, that's all I can remember clearly.
4	2012-12-29	3	12	Crush, New Yea	I had a really weird dream last night. I was in a singing contest and I was the last to go on and I didn't know what to sing today is our last day of doing stuff in Utah, because tomorrow morning, we are leaving for Las Vegas for our annual trip for New Year's Eve, finally. After New Year's Eve, we go back home. But after that, we only have a few days before having to go back to school. Although that's not entirely bad since I can see all my friends. Dot dot dot and the person I like. I wonder how she will react since on the last day. It seemed like she found out I had a crush on her.
5					Hi, once again. So today we are leaving Utah and heading into Las Vegas. Hope we have a safe trip also hopefully we didn't leave anything at the cabin. I have everything I could need to entertain myself. Although it's a shorter trip than if we were to drive from our home to Monterey Park California. Plus with less traffic. Exclamation point. Some dreams really freak me out. Like last night, my 6th grade teacher, Miss tarzia, took a handful of students, including me to her classroom where she asked us for reading homework, which is weird since she teaches science from 7th grade. Plus she was meaner than how she usually is super nice. The good thing though, was that out of the people, she picked one of the One was the person I like and she sat right next to me. The odd thing is I first started liking her in that class. But {dot}, {dot}