

Several of our course readings were important conceptual conversation partners (and aesthetic inspirations) as I put together my “Where I’m From” poem. As I wrote more thoroughly in my last Moodle post, I got very interested in the meaning-making possibilities of “cycling” (rapid perspective changing) both in space (Leander & Vasudevan, 2009) and time (Bechdel, 2007). I wanted a medium that would allow me to juxtapose images in order to annotate my past with the perspective of the present, as Bechdel does. Making these connections was an attempt to enact my “fromness” in communities of amateur making, not unlike Jovana choosing to wear her Aztlán t-shirt in order to “claim Mexican-ness” (Lewis & Moje, 2003, p. 1984). As I have lived into my identity as a priest, it has been increasingly important to me not lose track of the other identities I claim (engineer, editor, musician, etc.). In this poem I stand at some of those crossroads and reflect.

I began very interested in having my poem be a physical thing. I was picturing students in the class pressing a button and some kind of Rube Goldberg machine unspooling little rolls of paper, displaying digital images, speaking lines in the “Microsoft Sam” voice, etc. But if my digital making skills are spotty, my physical ones are abysmal, and I knew I didn’t have the time. So my first thought was to intercut the text of my poem with video of actual Rube Goldberg machines in action (like [this one](#), littered with little time boundary crossings in a way Bechdel would surely love). But for better or worse, I wanted the piece to have the narrative throughline of an actual prose poem, and I wasn’t sure I could do that in a satisfying way with regular interruptions. Getting increasingly desperate, I spent a shift in iDesign trying to learn enough Adobe After Effects to animate simple Rube Goldberg bumpers in and out (e.g., a marble rolls down a ramp to press the start button). I have a ramp and marble to return to someday, but rolling rather than sliding it down the ramp is too much for my meager skills at present.

I was saved by our two recent videos (McCloud, 2009; Banyai in Empringham, 2013). I realized I could achieve something like the effect of a collage comic in Prezi, and the drama of “Zoom” is accessible in any platform that uses an infinite canvas. From there, the process was

slow but straightforward. My goal was to capture a sense of “*meandering* among communities of shared creative passion” despite the fact that the poem itself is straightforwardly chronological (middle school, high school, college/grad school). Somewhere along the line, I realized with a chuckle that my strange journey from nuclear engineer to Episcopal priest is kind of a Rube Goldberg machine itself, in its apparent inefficiency and lack of cohesion.

The unexpected pleasure of the project was getting to play with language—always the fun of poetry—but in a more visual way (physically arranging words to emphasize certain rhythms, choosing expressive fonts, etc.). My fear is that the piece will “read” as a series of opaque in-jokes (always the danger of tight-knit community, I suppose). My hope is that it captures my gratitude and enthusiasm for the chance, in a small way, to participate with others in what Douglas Adams called “the stratosphere . . . of pure, creative playfulness” (2002, p. 67).

References

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