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Reflection: The Story of Bastogne—Joseph Charles Syiek

Our group composed a video centered upon a personal letter sent home from revered war veteran Joseph Charles Syiek, capturing the raw vulnerability and fear of a soldier who would later earn numerous medals for his bravery. Syiek fought in the bloody Battle of the Bulge of World War Two in Bastogne, Belgium.

Our video can be understood as the genre of a paragraph-animation historical remix in its careful reflection and animation of the letter's content. Importantly, the video makes the experience of war personal, and the voice-over of Syiek's letter, the accompanying war footage and the contemplative piano song all serve to evoke emotional reaction in the viewer. Watching this video, the experience of war and the magnitude of what is to be lost becomes apparent. Syiek does not glorify the experience of war, nor does he dismiss its cause— his unrehearsed, honest words seem to dismantle the romanticized conception of war to reveal to viewers the true cost of democracy. In this way, the genre is appropriate as the video transforms the historical into the personal through animation and remixing of images and video clips. Importantly, our video reflects the careful thought and emotional investment engendered by Tim's familial relation to Joseph C. Syiek, who was his great-uncle.

Our group gravitated towards composing in this particular genre because it allowed for us to experiment with various modes and to communicate multiple messages to viewers. Importantly, our group wanted to compose a video with deep, layered meanings, seen in the two dimensions of our video which communicate both the story of the lone soldier and the more

general tale of war. Moreover, our group was drawn to this genre because of the content we were working with, and the composition process was personal because of Tim's familial tie to Joseph C. Syiek.

Because our group was emotionally invested in the material we were working with, the creation process was meticulous yet rewarding. Our groups' personal connection to the material and feelings of responsibility to uphold Joseph C. Syiek's honor fueled our desire to make the video a success. To begin the creation process, we typed out the faded letter so that we could read it quickly when we recorded the video voice-over. Next, we watched several tutorials on YouTube about recording audio in iMovie. We then recorded Lauren, Tim and Tyler's voices as they alternated reading aloud segments of Syiek's letter, only to find that having a female voice echoing a male soldier's thoughts threw off the dynamic. To counter this setback, our group re-recorded the voice-over with only Tim and Tyler alternating paragraphs. Finally, our group layered into the video a piano song which complimented the tragic war clips. Undoubtedly, the layering of sound to create dynamic was the most tedious part of our composition process, and was, at times, frustrating.

After creating a video soundtrack of voice-over and piano, our group incorporated video clips and images which corresponded with Syiek's echoed words. Our group learned how to adjust volume on certain aspects of the video so that sounds of warfare didn't overpower the voice-over or the piano tune, and vice-versa. This was a particularly difficult part of the creation process, as it was hard to adjust one volume level without affecting them all.

Additionally, our group incorporated images of the actual battlefield where Syiek fought. We let our viewers know in the opening paragraphs that these images were taken by Syiek's family, making the video all-the-more personal. The majority of these photographs were shown

towards the end of the video. Importantly, the use of images and video are equally central to this video, communicating a more general sense of war mixed with Syiek's experience. Our group also included a quote from President Eisenhower, who voices the message prevalent throughout the film—that only those who have experienced war loathe it and know its true nature. Finally, our group included a photograph of Joseph C. Syiek himself at the end of the video, tying the spoken words to an identity, making the video all the more riveting.

Composing in this genre helped to extend our groups' knowledge of how multiple modes and mediums can work together to create meaning, relay a message and invite audience participation. At a fundamental level, our video operates through the dynamic of sound and use of various modes such as the aural, visual and the alphabetic. To clarify, our use of sound is critical, combining voice-over with sounds of warfare to personalize the experience of war. Moreover, sounds of warfare are juxtaposed against melancholic piano tunes, reminding the audience how a simple shot of a gun can result in a life of trauma or death. Through this creation process, our group learned how combining aural elements can create various meanings. We employed the aural mode to evoke a strong reaction from the viewer, allowing for them to make connections between the three layers of sound.

Our video incorporates visual and aural modes to make the letter come to life. While the aural mode does well on its own, the amalgamation of the aural and the visual modes serves to deliver information to the audience through a variety of powerful channels. To be more specific, the video includes both still images and video clips which correspond with the letter voice-over. Importantly, our group learned a great deal about how the aural and visual modes can work in unison as we made constant decisions about which images/video clips should correspond to which voice-over segments. Moreover, we learned that including the alphabetic mode with the

aural and the visual modes can be quite powerful in communicating a message to the audience. The alphabetic mode operates alone at the start of the video, when two paragraphs detailing Syiek's war journey appear without the aid of music or voice-over. These moments allow for the viewer to initially interpret the video's purpose without the influence of other modes. Later on, the alphabetic mode is used again, but in conjunction with other modes. The typed quote by President Eisenhower seems all the more devastating after the viewer has watched images of a soldier running for his life through the woods, with voice-over echoing the horrors of war. In this way, we employed all three aural, visual and alphabetic modes throughout our video to communicate to our viewers on a multitude of levels.

Our group enjoyed the composition process of this final project. At times, it was difficult to make sure that the various layers of sound did not overpower one another. However, we also learned a great deal about how these layers of sound can work together to communicate various messages to the viewer. For example, within our video there is the story of the lone soldier and also the more general story of war. The video can be interpreted through either one of these channels or as a combination of both. It is our hope that the voice-over sheds light upon the true experience of war, allowing for the viewer to come away feeling as if they have glimpsed into the life of a soldier and the unparalleled sacrifice it requires. Overall, our group is grateful that we could engage with a meaningful genre and create a product that speaks on various dimensions.

We have abided by the Wheaton College Honor Code in this project and paper reflection.

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