

THE DREAMS OF AL CAPONE



“The Dreams of Al Capone”

A Fair Use Film that transforms samples of existing films into a completely new story.

Personal Statement:

I had the idea of making a film out of other films. After a long slog to secure distribution for my previous film, I was motivated to make an experimental, creative project with the least amount of administrative headache possible. I knew what my story was going to be about: the collision of the personal and the political, and the collapse of American politics through neoliberalism into right wing fanaticism. The key was to figure out what form could hold both the idea and the story. Then it hit me--dreams. The idea of “dreams” could hold both the story, and how it was going to be made. Then Covid happened, so it was a perfect time to make “The Dreams of Al Capone.”

The film was made by shuttling back and forth between a traditional linear production and a reverse engineered one. Scenes were matched across actors, then placed within a rough narrative. Cause and effect of plot was figured out afterward, and then scenes were rearranged for dramatic emphasis. Finally, the script was written within the limit of available takes in the sampled scenes (after reading their lips and determining how many syllables for each line!).

I knew I was going to dub the whole thing in French before I started. “La Jetee” had always been influential to me, but so was Renoir and Godard and lots of French cinema. I knew French could smuggle in more suspension of disbelief and add a sensuality to the film’s roughness, but I didn’t expect the additional benefit it brought in perforating some of the ideology portrayed in the film.

The music is Beethoven and Radiohead cover songs because of the Romanticism and irony in both the story and the film’s means of production.

Odds and Ends:

- The story is told using 34 films across the cast I chose.
- There are 21 other videos, news clips, and other samples.
- Perhaps the most “influential” cast member is Peter Higgs of Higgs Boson/“The God Particle” fame who appears as a reporter asking Kristen Stewart a question.
- One film I “sampled” that is not seen, is an abridged Saul William’s “Sha Clack Clack” poem from “Slam”.
- Yes, I agree, the idea of AI in this context has a number of fascinating possibilities.

Considerations of Fair Use:

“In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include:

- 1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- 2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
- 3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole;
- 4) and the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.”



Collaborators:

Friends and family who urged me to see if it could be done, friends who told me it can’t and shouldn’t, VFX friend to help match shots through a few sleight-of-hand tricks, a sound designer to remake atmosphere and foley, artists and friends who gave feedback. (All to say, a piece like this that opens up conversation about authorship is very far from an auteur’s effort.)