Draft 1

When using After Effects' masking tool, it initially seemed easy to grasp and controllable. However, in this experiment, when I tried to replicate the selected reference work, I realized that the pre-recording preparation was something I had previously overlooked. Due to the instability of the footage and inconsistent lighting conditions, these differences were not only not concealed after applying masking, but were actually amplified.

Before becoming familiar with the specific operation of masking, I mainly understood it as a tool for assisting or cropping images, without considering its role when masking becomes visible in the image. In this experiment, although masking still serves an auxiliary function, it appears in the final image in a direct and undeniable way.

Masking clearly defines the boundaries within an image. This tool allows designers to distinguish between key and non-key areas, removing visual information irrelevant to the concept. By cutting and masking the image, masking guides the viewer's path, limiting their ability to choose what to look at, while also allowing the image to be modified or reconstructed.

This experiment raises new questions: Is it possible to intentionally disrupt the sharp boundaries created by masking during its use? Can masking transform from an auxiliary tool serving the image into the main subject of the image itself? In subsequent experiments, I plan to introduce visual instability and chaos by blurring the spatial boundaries formed by masking, thereby placing the masking itself in the center of the image, rather than hiding it behind the image.

Draft 2

My experimental tool was the mask in After Effects. According to the official definition, the primary purpose of a mask is to modify layers. In practice, masks use methods such as Reveal, Hide, Isolate, and Composite to define which content in the image is visible and which is invisible, thus establishing clear visual boundaries. In typical usage, masks are usually used as an auxiliary tool to enhance visual effects, and their presence is often hidden beneath the final rendering.

Based on the "process before result" principle of Conditional Design and the methodology of system discussed in this paper, I realized that my own practice also needed to shift from "using tools" to "designing systems." Therefore, I decided to establish a system for how masks appear in an image, using systematic rules and constraints to prioritize the process over the final effect. In this case, the mask is no longer a tool serving the image, but rather the result itself generated during the system's operation.

In the current experiment, I divided the screen into a coordinate system and used the coordinates of the person walking as the coordinates of the mask appearance. In subsequent experiments, I will further expand this system by adding more parameters such as speed, walking direction, and footstep overlap, so that the mask behavior is no longer triggered by a single variable, but generated under the combined effect of multiple conditions, thereby strengthening its attribute as a process result rather than a visual tool.

Draft 3

My tool is the mask tool in After Effects. This tool defines the visible and invisible elements in an image through methods like Reveal, Hide, Isolate, and Composite. As a tool hidden behind visuals, it helps construct the power of visibility and invisibility. I'm attempting to build a system guided by process, transforming the mask from a tool into a calculated result, thus transforming the mask from a tool of visual power into the calculated visual output itself, achieving a subversion. The core question in this process is how to make the mask a result rather than a tool?

The mask tool didn't cause me too many struggles in my initial learning and use. It allowed me to distinguish the information I wanted to show and hide in the video in a clear and efficient way. By simply selecting areas, I completed a copy of the target design. This learning experience deepened my understanding of the mask as a tool and gave me the direction to revolutionize the mask: transforming it from a tool into a visual subject.

In my experiments, the core issue was how to transform the mask from a tool into a visual subject. I tried David Hockney's photo collage experiment, attempting to use masks to collage videos of the same object from different angles. However, I found that in this process, the mask was still a tool for the image, and my visual perception determined how the object I chose would appear in the final image, rather than an iterative experiment with a sustainable direction.

In this experiment, collage was achieved by masking and displaying the image of the object. However, this method of masking and displaying was not iterative or sustainable, but rather a design based on my subjective visual judgment. Therefore, the mask still exists as a tool to assist the image and did not achieve the desired subversive effect.

In the Conditional Design Workbook Maurer (2013, p. ii) argued that We use logic to design the conditions through which the process can take place and Avoid arbitrary randomness. Difference should have a reason. This inspired me to design a system for masks. When a system is designed for mask generation, by incorporating different parameters to calculate mask generation, the appearance of the mask is no longer a tool but a result of calculation that appears on the screen.

In designing this system, I referenced Piet Mondrian's process in creating the painting "Tree." I established the foundation by removing perspective from the stripes on the floor and drawing them as a coordinate system. I incorporated pedestrian steps and stride length as basic parameters, and used different colors to distinguish whether a step fell on a single coordinate or multiple coordinates simultaneously, increasing the system's computational completeness. Through this system, the mask transformed from a tool used based on visual intuition into a result calculated from image information and data, thus eliminating my subjective composition as the author and the tool-like nature of the

mask.

During the experiment, I tried to make "process before result" the core principle of my experiment, thereby designing a sustainable iterative and process-guided experimental approach to transform the mask more completely from a tool into a computational result. These three drafts recorded and helped me from understanding the properties of the mask as a tool, finding the direction to subvert the mask as a tool, to the failure of the first experiment, and finally establishing the experimental system.

Maurer, L., Paulus, E., Puckey, J. and Wouters, R. (2013) Conditional Design Workbook. Amsterdam: Valiz.