

dénouement

A Subjective Reflection on Death, Loss and Grief
through Animation Practice

Lesley Ung



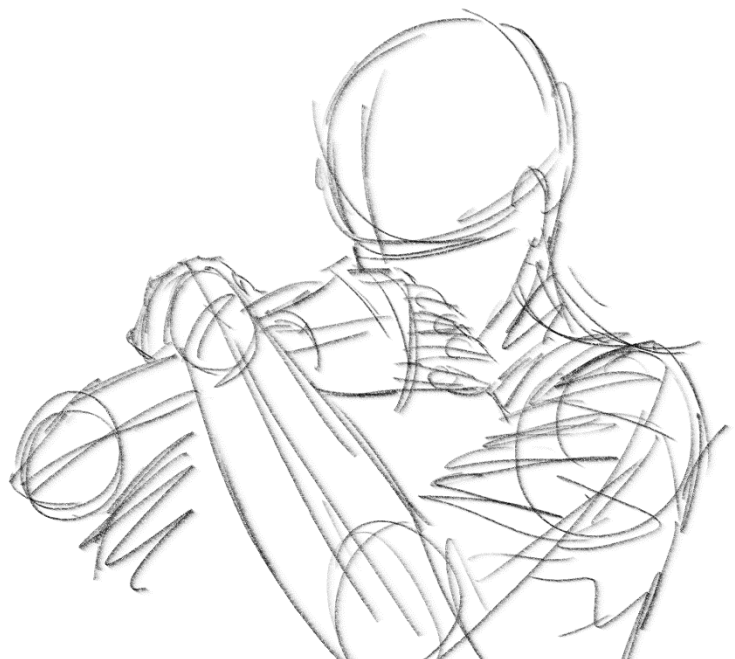
Dénouement: A Subjective Reflection on Death, Loss and Grief through Animation Practice

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Abstract

Dénouement: A Subjective Reflection on Death, Loss and Grief through Animation Practice is a practice-based research project that engages with the emotionally fraught, complex and human experience of losing a loved one. The research harnesses (subjective) thinking-feeling processes to explore how 2D (hand-drawn) animation might be informed by autoethnographic inquiry and practice-based methods to grapple with loss through an animated film's production. The project deploys animation practice as a mode of personally engaging with loss, exploring visual expressions of the internal, psychological, and abstract dialogue when grieving. *Dénouement* seeks to develop productive conversations about life, death and grief for the audience, framed in a humbling human experience.

Dénouement reflects the difficulty to engage with a complex (human) experience as its subject. As such, there has been a review of clinical and philosophical writing from thinkers such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Eric Shouse, and Judith Butler. To support the creative choices throughout the production, artists that engaged with confronting subjects, such as Francisco Goya, Richard Mosse and Tabaimo, informed the project. To understand best practices in emotional storytelling, the project drew inspiration from Pixar Animations' feature-length and short film narratives. The research positions the medium of 2D animation as a rich territory to explore visual expressions of grieving. Therefore, Paul Wells, John Canemaker and Glen Keane offered insights into the tactical, expressive medium. Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, Norman McLaren and Len Lye provided insights into the potential of surrealism and experimental animation as potent landscapes to explore the project's research aims.

The production of *Dénouement* drew upon a range of methods discovered during reviews of established methodological approaches, supporting the making, thinking, and feeling processes (autoethnography) and visual and textual analysis (dramaturgy). Practical tools found in the discipline of 2D animation, such as ideation drawing and iterative drawing, shaped the making methods. These methods were further refined by developing a production pipeline and the establishment of creative constraints explicitly designed for this project.

The artefact and accompanying thesis are framed within the researcher's subjective lens and draw from other practice-based, critical, historical, and narrative contexts to support the production of the final short film. The practice detailed in this thesis underpins the researcher's passion to draw the world (as they see it), moving it in time and moving those who view the work, emotionally.

Keywords: loss, death, grief, animation, hand-drawn, subjective, short film, illustration



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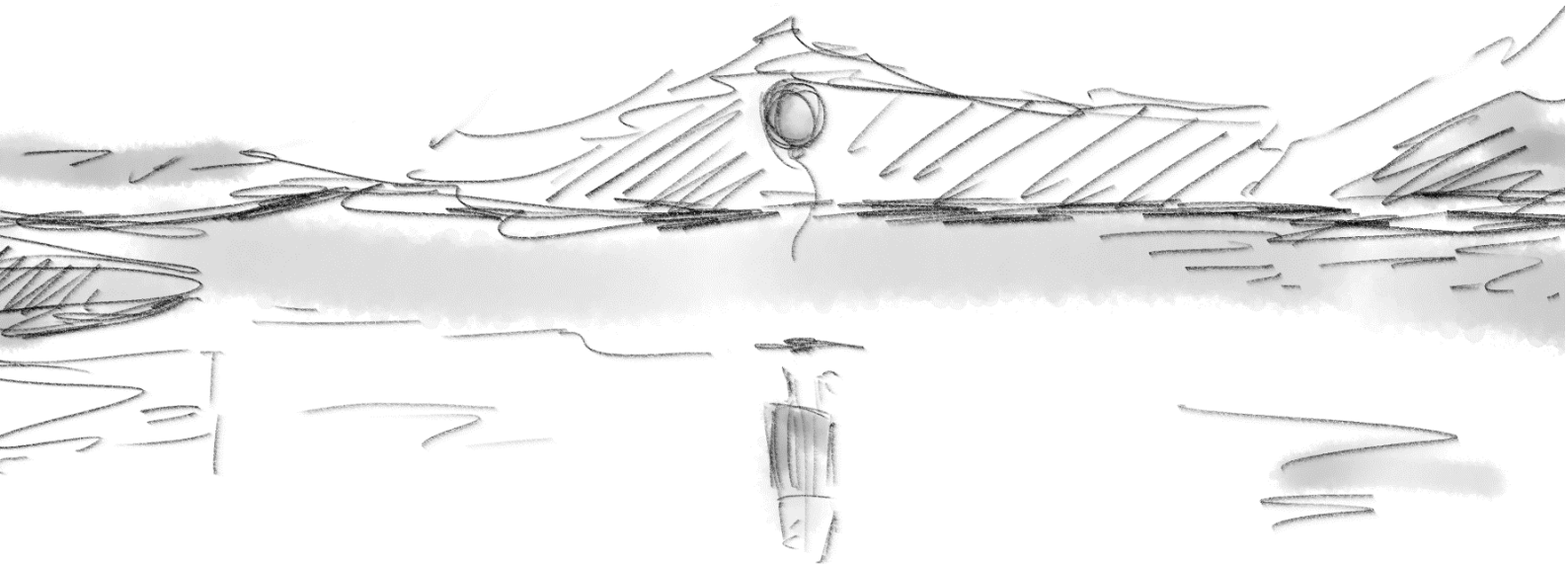
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 5/04/2022



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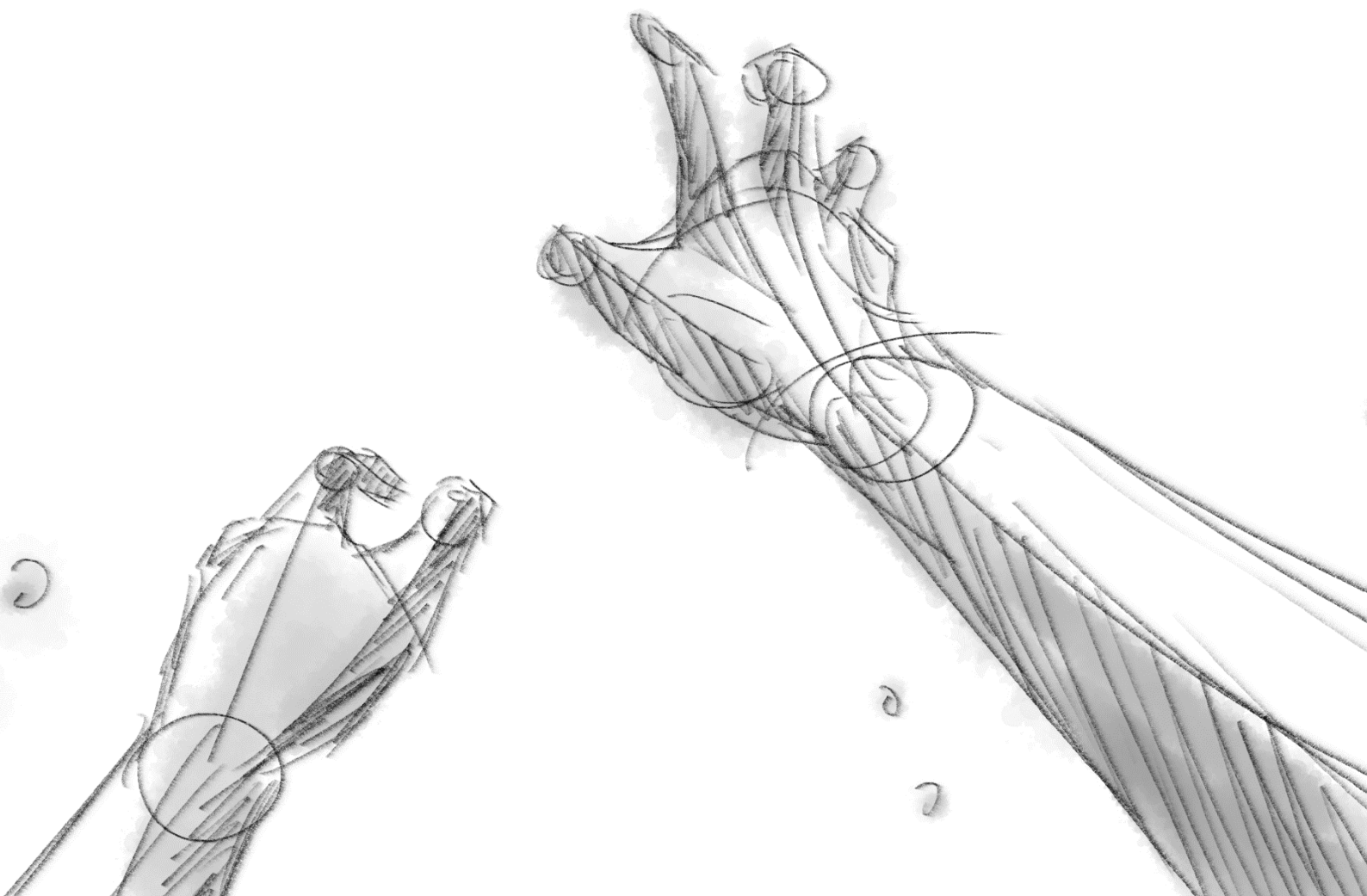
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Heartfelt thanks and love to you all,

Lesley





Introduction

In my social groupings, I often hear jokes about dying. It seems common for our generation to say we “want to die” or “this is it”, especially in times of immense stress. Repetition makes it easier to join in, and so I did. The idea of death became almost trivial, referred to as a way out, and we all seemed to laugh it off as a way of coping. Nevertheless, it became tricky for me, as it no longer served comically and was an alarm bell to underlying thoughts. I wondered whether dark humour might reflect something about where we are as a culture, for how we relate to and understand death.

In 2019-2020 I attained a summer studentship with the Good Health Design Lab (GHD), Waitematā District Health Board (WDHB) and Auckland Regional Dental Service (ARDS).¹ During this placement, I was introduced to the complexity of health-related contexts, raising my interest in the potential of storytelling in this space.² About a month after I started working on *Dénouement*, COVID-19 entered our lives. In my attempts to understand the clinical side of death (to communicate through my practice), I was also concerned about my family, especially my ageing parents. During this time, I lacked a lot of sleep and had harrowing nightmares with vivid depictions of loved ones dying. These nightmares felt tangible, as if they were a lived experience. While grappling with these thoughts alone, it unravelled into something unapologetically loud, about my anxieties to lose people I love, while having lost people I love.

Dénouement: A Subjective Reflection on Death, Loss and Grief through Animation Practice is a practice-based research project that engages with the experience of losing a loved one. The research positions 2D (hand-drawn) animation as rich territory for exploring grief’s internal, psychological, and abstract dialogue through visualising the inarticulable. The research harnesses (subjective) thinking-feeling processes to explore how 2D animation might be informed by autoethnographic inquiry and practice-based methods to grapple with loss through an animated film’s production. As a personal reflection of complicated feelings, the aim is not to show the world as it is but as it is travelled through psychologically. *Dénouement* is framed by humble experiences that seek to encourage productive conversations around loss, life, and grief for the audience.

The thesis is organised across four chapters. Chapter One presents a range of contexts around the communication of loss and how that viewpoint informs a study of creative production around complex topics. The first section introduces initial contextual research into clinical and artistic representations of death as a survey of work and thinking I reviewed. As a stepping stone to draw upon my feelings (and sensations) from personal experiences of loss, the research then focused on grief. The inquiry led me to seek practitioners who have successfully engaged with challenging subjects, such as Francisco Goya, Richard Mosse and Tabaimo. The artists captivated my attention as I noted their mastery of complex emotional works (across different mediums) and informed my thinking as I made crucial decisions in the practice of the project’s progression.

¹ Khoo, Cassie, and Lesley Ung. "The Patient Journey for Children’s Dental Service." Good Health Design. 2022. <https://www.goodhealthdesign.com/projects/the-patient-journey-for-childrens-dental-service>.

² My role was to create a promotional animated short. The project was an online resource explaining the patient’s journey, communicating key information and procedures.

Chapter Two contextually reviews animation practices and cinematic influences on my project. Pixar's storytelling philosophy deals with emotional landscapes in feature-length and short film formats. In terms of emotive storytelling, reviewing a range of Pixar's work informed my thinking, approach to storytelling and making methods. This led to the medium of hand-drawn animation, as it details my feelings visually and articulates how I see the world. The tactile and human aspect of drawing allows my fingerprints to bleed through as an artist. Using traditional animation as a tool (to grapple with my feelings around death), I drew on practitioners who pushed the boundaries of language and storytelling for both our eyes and ears within the short film format. The practitioners Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, Tabaimo, Norman McLaren and Len Lye provided insights into the potential of surrealism and experimental animation as aesthetic references that informed the creative process. These filmmakers and films were helpful touchstones to engage with, particularly concerning animation as a tool to convey my experience.

Chapter Three presents an overview and critique of the methods I applied to negotiate the research aims (of *Dénouement*). An autoethnographic approach (the Thinking, Making and Feeling process) articulated my voice within this project. Proven dramaturgical (cinematic/theatre-based) methods (Visual and Textual analysis) informed the project underpinning the contexts I outlined in previous chapters. These methodological approaches helped me establish a series of creative constraints centred on the specific circumstances of my project and the overall production pipeline. The chapter includes an overview of iterative drawing as a method and approach that provoked creative choices, specifically to refine aesthetic, durational, and transitional decisions during the production.

Chapter Four is the Documentation of Practice, demonstrating the action as they unfolded across the production pipeline. I discuss (with practical examples) my decision-making processes throughout the project, reflect on how my subjective feelings of death, loss, and grief affect me personally, and how this shaped the direction of the making. The story of the practice is framed temporally by the production, stepping through sometimes contradictory emotional states, travelling across melancholy through to celebratory discovery, and back again.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the knowledge gained through practice. Here, I contemplate potential future directions as a storyteller and acknowledge the transformation the project has provided as a researcher and person.

Chapter One: Reframing Death – Communicating Loss and Complexity

Clinical Representations of Death

Death, a universal human experience, has been represented and understood in many ways throughout time and across cultures. In the early stages of the project, I set out to explore animation in the context of palliative care. Researchers at Good Health Design³ observed that clinicians often struggled to communicate with patients (specifically those with life-limiting illnesses). As such, my exploration of death started from a clinical Western medical perspective, which a cultural arbiter of death is in many ways.⁴

In *A Beginner's Guide to the End*, Bruce (BJ) Miller and Shoshana Berger speak on the preparation for concluding life.⁵ They discuss living with meaning, infusing practical advice with medicine's contribution to the end of life. The authors argue that death is the ultimate loss of control due to uncertainty about what happens after, and we cannot remove that threat.⁶ Thus there is a plethora of documentation about clinical (and artistic) lenses, suggesting we want to know more about the uncontrollable. The end of life calls on the objective and clinical lens simply due to procedures, where say, one ends up in a hospital, relies on heavy medication, and faces the formal rituals of dying. Everything must encounter an end, making it universally understandable but not necessarily approachable. However, it became increasingly difficult to compartmentalise my feelings, and I became exhausted from the clinical lens. Death as solely a clinical conversation means we do not honour the human turmoil of loss.⁷ I realised the need for explorative, subjective and poetic framing because my practice offers the opportunity to explore complex emotions radically, for myself.

Reframing my understanding of death towards a more emotional landscape shifted the work's intent. Involving practitioners (such as myself) helps to reframe death as an experience, focusing on crafting the journey as we head towards it.⁸ My position is to challenge how I communicate my subjective feelings (those I cannot articulate) with animation as a tool but not create an instructional guide or diagnosis for the audience to follow. In return, it encourages viewers to recognise their own conversation, approaches or feelings in a less clinical sense.

Literary, Artistic and Symbolic Representation

Moving away from a clinical lens, I looked toward representations of death in literature and art. For example, in modern English literature, an elegy, a poem of serious reflection, is commonly a

³ GHD are a transdisciplinary design and research studio based at AUT's School of Art + Design. They focus on using design to empower, delight, and enrich lives in our communities.

⁴ Chatterjee, Suhita Chopra. "Death and Discourse of the Body." Research Article, *Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India* 45 (2002): 321-30.

⁵ Miller, Bruce (B.J), and Shoshana Berger. *A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death* 1st ed. United States of America: Simon & Schuster, 2019. Hardcover.

⁶ Ibid.,78.

⁷ Ibid.,90.

⁸ Ibid.,30.

lament for the dead.⁹ It is a form of poetry that lends itself to contemplation for the poet and presents absence in what is lost or desired for an unfulfilled future. I drew knowledge from Thomas Gray based on his 1751 poem, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, which reflects our equality in the eyes of death and how the rich and poor are buried in the same churchyard, regardless of wealth or power.¹⁰ The writer highlights our desire to be remembered after death, irrespective of social status. Gray then contemplates how he or the poet within this elegy may be remembered; recognising remembrance occurs from being remembered by another. It calls on how we seek value in human pursuits of a legacy as a type of immortality. Those we have lost leave shadows or imprints in the world that drift into the consciousness of the living (as memories). These reflections, for example, are not treated in themselves as an elegy and always return to concern the poet themselves. The articulation of these reflections touches upon the character, their experience(s) or their reaction.¹¹ Following similar sentiments for character animation, this approach is best said by animator Ollie Johnston:

Always remember that you are not just animating movement, you are animating feelings
– think about what your character is thinking and why do they feel that way?¹²

The poem echoes other works borrowed from Gray's contemporaries. An example is alluding to William Shakespeare's "To hear the solemn curfew" from the 1850s, *The Tempest*.¹³ As a living poet at the time, Gray revivifies the poems of the dead to living audiences. The elegy serves as meditation, and particular features such as graves, the church and silent darkness repeat in different works throughout history.¹⁴ Allusions to other literature honour his contemporaries but are rewritten to articulate Gray's subjective contemplations. The poet's choice caught my attention because initially, I intended to use recognisable symbols to express a universal understanding of loss or what grief looks like. I soon realised Gray's method of alluding to respected literature applies, referring to common symbology as a starting point which helped develop my own symbols, in the creative process.

Different cultures and generations cope with death differently, shaping different symbolic representations.¹⁵ For example, some symbols no longer resonate with contemporary contexts. We live in multicultural and multivalent societies where religious and secular aspects exist alongside each other. Symbols of death vary by a person's faith or non-faith belief systems and are presented in various depictions.¹⁶ In looking at symbolism, the inquiry led me to investigate how art has historically engaged with the subject of death. Artwork and objects depicting death

⁹ Kennedy, David. *Elegy*: Routledge, 2008.

¹⁰ Gray, Thomas. *An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*: HM Caldwell, 1901.

¹¹ I found this compelling as I aimed to apply my contemplations/experiences throughout my life and translate this into animation. This approach was harnessed during the thinking and making phases of the project.

¹² Thomas, Frank, Ollie Johnston, and Frank Thomas. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*: Hyperion New York, 1995.

¹³ Shakespeare, William, John Moore, William Charles Macready, and William Evans Burton. *Tempest*: Phillips, Sampson, 1850.

¹⁴ Wright, George T. "Stillness and the Argument of Gray's "Elegy"." *Modern Philology* 74, no. 4 (1977): 381-89.

¹⁵ Collier, C. D. Abby. "Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Symbolism of Death." *The Sociological Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2003): 727-49.

¹⁶ Lifton, Robert Jay. "On Death and Death Symbolism: The Hiroshima Disaster." *Psychiatry* 27, no. 3 (1964): 191-210

can offer insight into how different periods and cultures perceived death as an inescapable presence.¹⁷

Vanitas is a form of 17th-century art that exhibits symbols of mortality, encouraging reflection upon life.¹⁸ We gravitate to these works because it is a startling reminder of the universal experience of living. Popularised in the medieval period, these artworks often were presented as (but not restricted to) still-life paintings. The symbols within the work carry various allegorical meanings. Examples are the skull solidifying death's inevitability or bubbles representing life's fragility. Sculptures were another form of this art, and theatre performances enact tales of our fleeting existence.¹⁹ These melancholic reflections were time capsules of thinking from the time, pursuing our fascination with death expressed in *Ars moriendi* (The Art of Dying) and the *Memento Mori* (Remember That You Will Die).²⁰ Death art images and objects support the living with these contemplations (of life, death and loss), aiding the grieving process, providing artistic expression and reflecting a place in time.

As *Avant-Garde* experimentation rose in the 20th century, abstract art took an expressionistic approach to change the representation of death.²¹ Death was presented subtly as an underlying theme to allow more radical experimentation but not in a brashly bold manner because of "abstractification". During *Postmodernism* and *Contemporary art*, death art images progressed to more literal representation than traditional symbolism. Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series exemplify the intense shift in how we present death in art. The imagery of suicides, electric chairs and car crashes remain questioned for whether Warhol wanted to show life at its most grim or use repetition to desensitise from the heavy imagery. Throughout history, the explorations of death's symbols demonstrate how they can remain malleable, creative and subjective for a practitioner.

To reflect on this research, I explore some common symbols through drawing (Figure 1 and 2). These symbols offer a starting point to look at what was previously accepted and highlight the role of symbolism in the conversation about death. With *Dénouement*, the medium of animation allows freedom for whimsical depictions and a safe environment to navigate how I feel – much like how literature and art have done the same for contemplations of artists, poets and consumers of that work. *Dénouement* calls for new (or revived) symbols and depictions, which in Chapter Four is explored for what resonates subjectively.²²

¹⁷ This research made me wonder whether we (as curious human beings) create these art forms to better understand death, while at the same time, reflect upon celebrations of life.

¹⁸ Cheney, L. D. "The Symbolism of the Skull in Vanitas: Homo Bulla Est." *Cultural and Religious Studies* 6, no. 5 (2018): 267-84.

¹⁹ Ravenal, John B. *Vanitas: Meditations on Life and Death in Contemporary Art*. Vol. 258: University of Washington Press, 2000.

²⁰ Rodriguez, Luis M. "Ars Moriendi." *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2004).

²¹ Mitter, Partha. "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery." *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531-48.

²² Based on what has been presented throughout my life, the common symbols that come to mind do not fall short of decaying flowers, skulls, butterflies, and moths. I challenged myself to recalibrate our representation of the universal experience (death), proposing new visual depictions of feelings and thoughts that resonated with me.

Symbols & Motifs

↳ how can death be expressed/captured visually?
 ↳ a library of symbols/motifs/ideas that relate with death.

↳ GOAL: recalibrating the archetype of death instead of representing it.

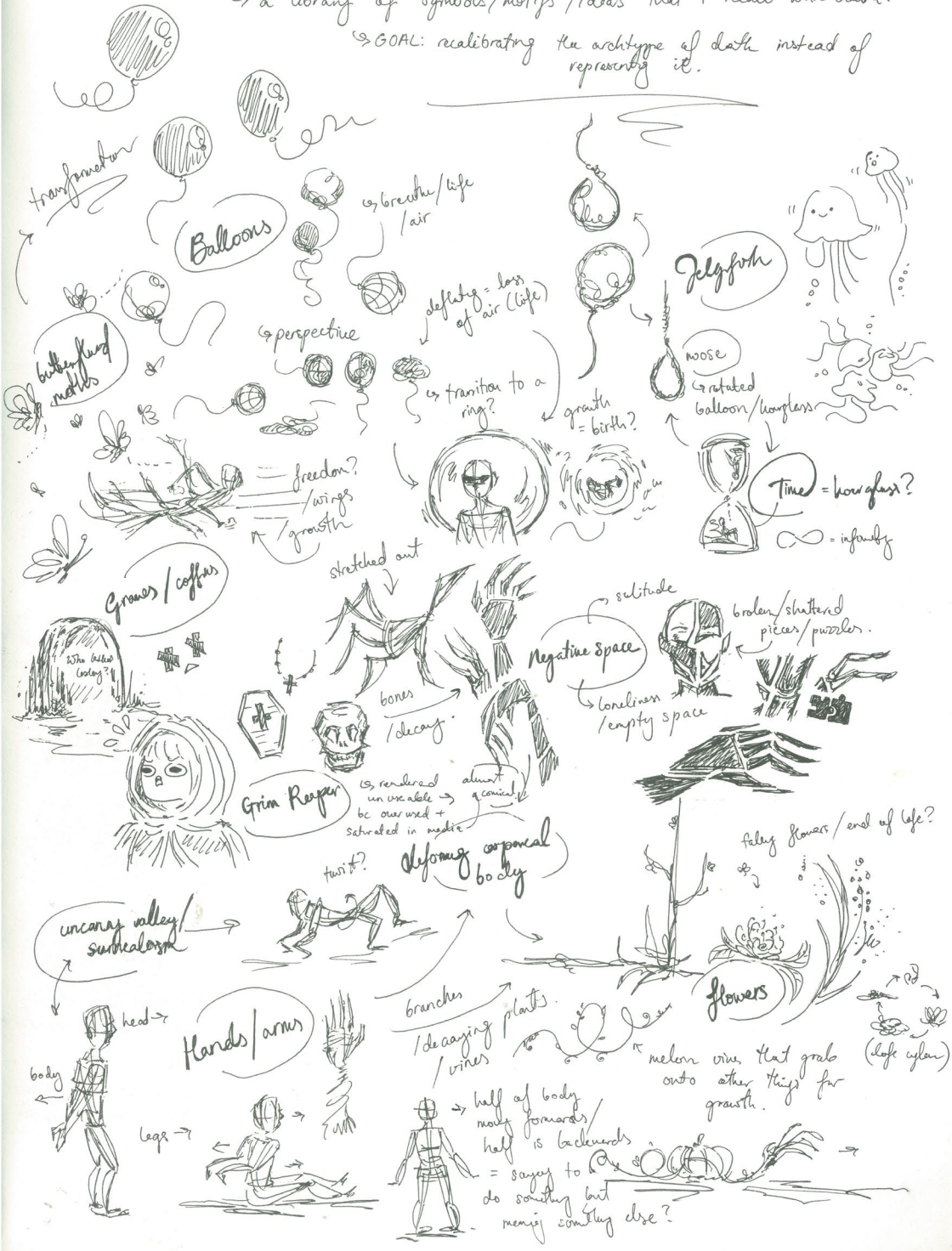
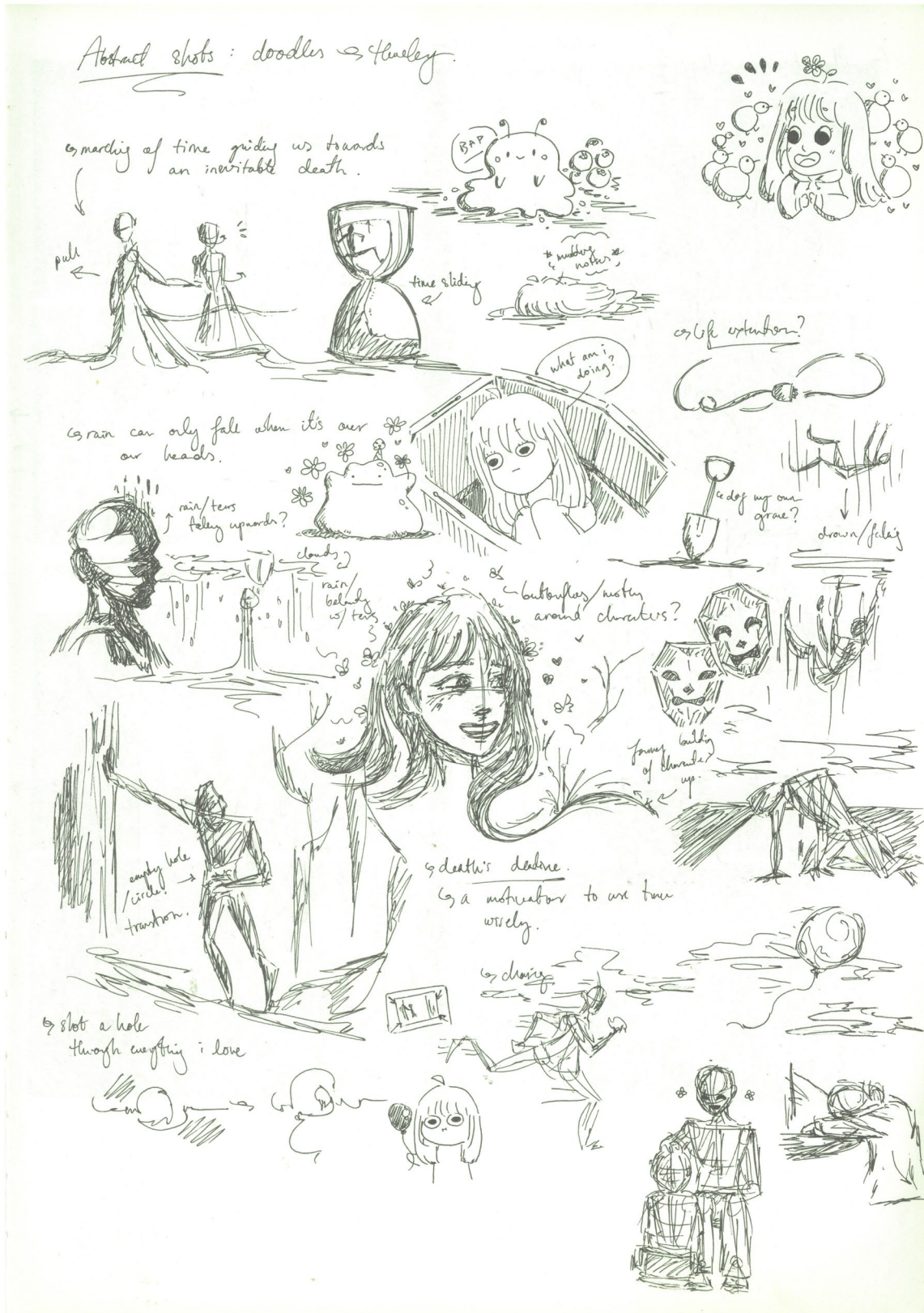


Figure 1. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Exploration of Symbols and Motifs based on research, 2020*, scanned image, Auckland



Grief: The Grieving Process

As we experience the loss of a loved one, a series of psychological responses are at play. Therefore, I explored some psychological literature on death, dying and grief, such as *The Five Stages of Grief*, developed by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.²³ The distinctive stages of grief (as per this model) include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. While this model observes how people can cope with dying, it does not definitively determine a linear framework to adhere to. In a later book, *On Grief and Grieving*, Kübler-Ross and co-author David Kessler present how the previous model had strengthened since its introduction in 1969.²⁴ The authors also recognise the misinterpretations of the research, which is often seen as a framework to process loss in a linear, prescribed model.

Kübler-Ross intended to introduce these stages as a way to understand grief further. My grieving process has not followed *The Five Stages of Grief* in a linear order, nor does it rely on it to label what I cannot articulate. However, the research offers an initial gateway to recognise how the grieving process has been vocalised for different people. The subjectivity highlights the grieving experience as something that looks, feels and is processed differently for each individual. The framework wavers when questioned for validity in application to true human experience, as emotions can bounce around in a non-linear fashion. The clinical aspect also reveals how the framework is not easily or universally understood as a tool.

The thinking-making process allows the project to evolve, explore and visualise a journey travelled through as it presents itself - similar to allowing our emotions (from grieving) to emerge on its own, as it is. Within my animation, I want to reflect on non-linearity, which compares to the progression of dreams/nightmares, as well as emotional states. Categorising my feelings to dissect them is not the goal or reason they are important to the conversation. My interest is in how the emotions manifest, travel through and reveal themselves within the practice. Applying animation as a comforting tool opens up a non-clinical conversation that supports my navigation creatively. Alongside that, *Dénouement* does not aim to categorise the audience's feelings (once they have watched the film) and looks at this discussion with compassion, understanding and empathy.

Grief, Affect and Abstraction

Affect, in psychology, refers to the underlying experience of feeling, emotion, or mood.²⁵ The response to affect is emotions such as grief, sadness and joy, to name a few. As grief responds to

²³ Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

²⁴ Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

²⁵ Shouse, Eric. "Feeling, Emotion, Affect." *M/c journal* 8, no. 6 (2005).
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2443>.

the affective transaction, my use of affect in *Dénouement* distinctly concerns my grieving process (in response to loss). To the project, affect is important because loss is a collective experience, but our lived experiences and emotions are subjective. The project responds to the transformational aspect of losing a loved one (experience), which in turn (subjective to the individual) transmits as grief (or other emotions) during the film's negotiation with the subject.

In *Feeling, Emotion, Affect*²⁶, Eric Shouse articulates an understanding of affect that aligns with this research project. Shouse states that affect is unformed and unstructured (abstract), making it more universally transmittable than the fixation on a particular feeling or emotion. Affect is a powerful social force transferable because of its "abstractivity".²⁷ The transaction between a lived experience is translated into emotion through collective (societal) and subjective lenses (such as memory). The transaction of losing someone (the affective experience) allows affect to release emotions, such as grief. The presence of this theoretical discourse afforded opportunities to negotiate my own feelings, parallel to the practice (discussed in Chapter Four).

Antonio Damasio states that feelings do not have intensity without affect, and it is difficult to make rational decisions without those feelings.²⁸ Affect establishes the relationship between the environment, our corporeal body, and the subjective experience we engage with through feeling and thinking. The project relies on my intense feelings to negotiate between the film, research and practitioner. Shouse articulates how affect transmits and its ability to resonate as follows:

The transmission of affect is about the way that bodies affect one another. When your body infolds a context, and another body (real or virtual) is expressing intensity in that context, one intensity is infolded into another. By resonating with the intensity of the contexts it infolds, the body attempts to ensure that it is prepared to respond appropriately to a given circumstance. Given the ubiquity of affect, it is important to take note that the power of many forms of media lies not so much in their ideological effects, but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning.²⁹

*Precarious Life*³⁰ by Judith Butler speaks about the corporeal human responses, which are affective. Butler states that mourning involves the awareness of what we have lost and managed "by its enigmatic dimension" through "the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom". As such, we cannot understand feelings of grief, joy and sadness felt within loss because it is simply incomprehensible as emotions. This discussion leads the practitioner to believe we can negotiate these complex feelings through the practice. From a research position, it is important since grief (as an emotion) emerges from the affective response to loss.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler discusses the collective experience of loss and pivots into the political potential of grieving. Butler states that our "loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all".³¹ We are all

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Damasio, Antonio. "Descartes' Error (1994)." *The Feeling of What Happens* (2006): 22-204.

²⁹ Shouse,1.

³⁰ Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*: verso, 2004.

³¹ Ibid., 20.

connected by loss (in that we have all lost someone or something), so there is a collective affective experience. Affect has a physiological transaction and is felt collectively as an everyday human experience. Affect, as defined above, operates across two thresholds in *Dénouement*. First, the affect emergent from the transaction of loss (as an experience) translates into possibly grief, sadness or melancholy (for example). Then there is the work itself, which aims to transmit these complex (subjective) feelings through an affective connection (with the work). It is not meant to be prescriptive in that the viewer should feel sad. The abstraction within the illustration forms a tactile connection. No matter how those in the audience feel, they are still connected one way or the other. I intend to direct the audience to feel their connection by relating their own stories to the animation.

The research is interested in Butler's discussion (of grieving), due to the contemplation of grief as a potential tool to view and understand the world differently. Interestingly, grief does not exist without an affective experience because grief is an emergent emotion based on transactional affect. Grief emerges from the combination of life experiences one has with another person who is no longer around. Butler articulates that there is loss as it is and the co-existence of a "transformative effect of loss", which we cannot organise or blueprint.³² For example, the practitioner cannot determine how to navigate loss or the outcome. Grief is a tool to look at the world differently; there is no set framework to aim for based on endurance through loss. This discussion mirrors the section above about the grieving process. We cannot tell each other how to grieve with a predetermined manual - we can only experience it as is.

The practice aims to harness abstraction to transmit affective experiences. Butler's discussion enlightens the research because we all experience the deaths of people we know and our own death (a collective affective experience). As the practitioner, I have a tangible presence in this conversation because I am translating personal feelings. The viewer travels through the character's experience that is abstracted in animation. When viewed by an audience, it is not one person's story – many stories can run through the film subjectively. The abstraction allows people to enter on their terms, through their own experiences, to connect in their own subjective way. Alongside grief as a potent tool, art also allows us to understand the world differently.

Artists who deal with difficult subjects through crafted aesthetics

Francisco Goya - Caricature the graphic horrors of conflict

Artist Francisco Goya caricatures the graphic horrors of conflict through painting, printmaking, and etching (drawing). Goya's work reflects contemporary historical upheavals and heavily influenced 19th - 20th-century painters.³³ The artist's attention to the anatomical and grim bleakness of the world assembled a collection of tantalising yet disturbing art. In particular, Goya's series, *Disasters of War*³⁴, explained the barbarity displayed in prominent historical events. The cruelties Goya witnessed created an unsettling perspective on human nature and affirmed the failures of the nation's system. To understand Goya's subjective war experiences, he utilised the fluidity of etching to capture his progressively grim imagination and fragments of reality he

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Hagen, Rose-Marie, Francisco Goya, and Rainer Hagen. *Francisco Goya, 1746-1828*: Taschen, 2003.

³⁴ Goya, Francisco. *The Disasters of War*: Courier Corporation, 1967.

witnessed. Goya did not create these images to glorify or rationalise the actions of society. The artist opted to critique the conflict as a collection of individual acts of determination, barbarism, and inhumanity.³⁵ *Disasters of War* disrupt the narrative of dramatic heroism to guard the people, save the land, and reveal horrific atrocities experienced in war.

Goya presents a rawness in fine lines, mastering techniques of shadow and shade and does not use colour within the series. The artist stated, "In art, there is no need for colour. Give me a crayon, and I will 'paint' your portrait."³⁶ Goya informs the project with their approach of monochromatic visuals and sketchy lines to effectively translate a subjective experience.



Figure 3. Francisco Goya. *Y no hai remedio (And There Is No Remedy)* from *The Disasters of War*, 1811–12 (1st edition), printed etching, Retrieved from <https://fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/goja-the-disasters-of-war/>

Richard Mosse - Disturbing reality rendered beautiful

Richard Mosse, a conceptual documentary photographer and filmmaker, creates tactful, potent and alluring imagery in his work. In particular, Mosse's multi-channel video installation *Incoming*³⁷ uses military-grade thermal surveillance cameras to illustrate the refugee crisis (in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa), questioning our regard of refugees as an entity.³⁸ Though not intended for aesthetics or storytelling, the camera identifies heat instead of light and creates a bleak monochromatic perspective. Mosse personalises technology by creating an immersive, humanistic art form that encourages viewers to understand the refugees' challenges, journeys, and alienation. The filmmaker embraces the experiences we rarely see or want to see and does

³⁵ Meyers, Jeffrey. "Hemingway and Goya." *Sewanee Review* 123, no. 4 (2015): 668-74.

³⁶ Ibid.


³⁷ Mosse, Richard. "Richard Mosse: Incoming." 2017. <http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming>.

³⁸ O'Hagan, Sean. "Richard Mosse: Incoming Review Shows the White-Hot Misery of the Migrant Crisis." *The Guardian* 15 (2017).

not film conflict.³⁹ As it may not look real, Mosse's choice of a unique, surreal and specific aesthetic offers a sense of fantasy. As viewers, we can digest it because it does not feel real.

Incoming mesmerises the viewer and is subjectively more poetic as photographic stills because any frame (within the film) is unsettling and intriguing. The aesthetic choice dehumanises the human-to-human connection, and Mosse's quote speaks to *Dénouement's* approach:

Beauty is one of the main ways to make people feel something. It's the sharpest tool in the box. If you're trying to make people feel something, if you're able to make it beautiful, then they'll sit up and listen.⁴⁰



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Figure 4. Richard Mosse. *Incoming*, 2017, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2019/richard-mosse-incoming.html>

Tabaimo - Exploring everyday things expressively

Tabaimo is an experimental Japanese artist who works with large-scale installations and animation. The artist is another example of the practitioner and practice, questioning how they can feel and sense the world differently, to improve their experiences of living in the world. The artist's animated installations deal with everyday things rendered expressively strange to comment on our mundane lives.⁴¹ Tabaimo's art is a surreal unity of modern and classic stylisation in themes, presentation, and making. *Teleco-soup*⁴² is a monochromatic animated installation projected onto eighteen screens. The installation presents a cityscape engulfed in a rain of

³⁹ For example, Mosse highlights the disturbing realities of people living on the outskirts and presents people simply trying to survive.

⁴⁰ Mosse, Richard. "Richard Mosse: Incoming." 2017. <http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming>.

⁴¹ Ringelberg, Kirstin. "Little Sister, Big Girl: Tabaimo and the Gendered Devaluation of Contemporary Japanese Art." *Woman's art journal* 38, no. 2 (2017): 31-41.

⁴² Tabaimo. "Teleco-Soup", <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/veniimo3>, 2011. Animated Installation. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/veniimo3>.

feathers, stringy hair, phallic mushrooms and shifts to the pulsation of an apocalyptic ocean.⁴³ *Teleco-soup* deals with Japan's challenges as an isolated nation within the commercial world. The lower frame rate (compared to twenty-four frames per second) guides us through incredibly complicated graphics in the animation. As an artist, Tabaimo highlights constraints, such as frame rate, time allocation (for commission pieces) and working as the sole animator (especially in earlier works).

When I'm making my work, I take 50% of the responsibility, the other half of the responsibility is on the viewer, then the work is complete.⁴⁴

Tabaimo understands that the exhibitions change through each iteration, conversation and engagement with the viewer. The animator openly encourages the viewer to respond to the work as it is and interpret it through their subjective lens rather than look for the artist's intention.



Figure 5. Tabaimo. *Teleco-Soup*, 2011, projection still, Retrieved from <https://www.artnews.com/gallery/art-in-america/aia-photos/tabaimo/2-8117/>

Reflection on Artists

Goya, Mosse, and Tabaimo deal with a range of incredibly complicated subjects. Goya's handmade drawings serve as caricatures of the horrors of the Spanish War for Independence and,

⁴³ Hinterwaldner, Inge. "Scene Changes with Plastic Visual Rhymes." *Animation practice, process & production* 3, no. 1-2 (2013): 93-131.

⁴⁴ Atlas, Charles. "Tabaimo in "Boundaries": Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 6." In *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, 54m, 2012. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s6/tabaimo-in-boundaries-segment/>.

subsequently, the Peninsular War. For Mosse, it is the abstraction of the refugee crisis, making it aesthetically alluring through technology intended as a weapon. Tabaimo abstracts the complexities of living in compressed urban situations through animation, illustration, graphic design, and large-scale installations. These artists use different means of translating complicated subjects through abstraction, which elicits an emotional response from the viewer. The response is to explore through the practice, using hand-drawn animation (which by nature is an abstraction) and play with how I abstractify the human experience. For example, I connect the human form to an object, such as the character with a floating balloon. It is a fun tool to utilise for visual transitions between scenes. Through this abstraction, the viewer constantly must work through what they see. The viewer processes the imagery as it is revealed and responds to the subject. With that, the abstraction allows the viewers to bring their own thoughts and feelings into the work.

Goya understands that his caricature drawings allow people to look at the horrors of the world. Mosse understands that technology not meant for storytelling (the thermal surveillance cameras) can render difficult things beautiful. Tabaimo understands the aesthetics of interactive animated installations that render familiar life strange, leaving her with emotional and sometimes outlandish compositions open for interpretation. As an animator, I understand the abstraction of my experiences and feelings is a potent tool. In Chapter Four, the lessons learned from Goya, Mosse and Tabaimo weave into the conversation of making.



Chapter Two: Contextual Review of Animation Practices and Cinematic Influences

Pixar's storytelling philosophy

Pixar Animation Studios' commitment to dealing with difficult themes, subjects, and emotions has intrigued me since I watched *Finding Nemo*⁴⁵ at age seven. Following the journey to find Nemo, I discovered a new appreciation for these whimsical, compelling, imaginative worlds with colourful characters.⁴⁶ Pixar's true achievement comes from illustrating stories beyond the technical spectacle of three-dimensional animation (3D). Though wholly enamoured by Pixar, the studio has many creative minds working on their films. *Dénouement* cannot replicate Pixar films due to the project's constraints. However, there is an opportunity to draw from their knowledge of practice, which has unbelievable capacities to communicate complex emotions.

The studio's storytelling operates with *Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling* as a guideline for their films.⁴⁷ Rule fourteen, in particular, starts to question the project's aims:

Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off? That's the heart of it.⁴⁸

The rule questions why the filmmaker wants to tell this story, why must this story exist, and what is the story's greater purpose? Pixar films have themes, purpose, and ideas focused on human, emotional experiences told through nonconventional characters. These include sea creatures (*Finding Nemo*), monsters (*Monsters Inc.*⁴⁹) and toys (*Toy Story*⁵⁰), just to name a few. Pixar also applies this to human characters that live within their animated world to reflect ours. It is seen in *Up*⁵¹ with Carl, who deals with the aftermath of loss and in *Soul*⁵² with Joe, an aspiring jazz musician searching for his life purpose. These layered characters allow viewers to identify with them as we understand their clear motivations. In response, we are more sympathetic to their experiences.

For example, *Toy Story* highlights the real antagonist as Sheriff Woody. Woody's ego, selfishness, and fear of replacement as the most beloved toy by his owner set the conflict in motion. As a character, it challenges Woody to accept life's natural occurrences of change. From an emotional standpoint, it resonates with the viewer navigating their own life changes. Pixar recognises that human stories resonate with people because they appeal to a potential truth about the human condition. The studio empathically whispers that they recognise we may feel this way and show us why we feel this way. Pixar also adapts its stories in 3D animation to embrace whimsy. *Finding*

⁴⁵ Stanton, Andrew. "Finding Nemo." United States: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 2003.

⁴⁶ Even though I was not a parent looking for a child or experiencing the world as a creature, I was looking forward to Marlin and Nemo's reunited hug. There is something powerful in the storytelling that kept me engaged.

⁴⁷ Seton, Mark. "Pixar phenomenology: The embodiment of animation." *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine* 157 (2008): 94-97.

⁴⁸ "Pixar Story Rules (2011)." Ferruccio Digital Works, <https://www.davidaprice.com/pixar-story-rules>.

⁴⁹ Docter, Pete. "Monsters Inc.", 92m. United States: Pixar, Walt Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2001.

⁵⁰ Lasseter, John "Toy Story." 81m. United States: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 1995. Blu-ray Disc.

⁵¹ Docter, Pete. "Up." 96m. United States of America: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2009. Blu-ray Disc.

⁵² Docter, Pete. "Soul." 101m. United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2020.

Nemo takes full advantage of the 3D ocean setting, an extraordinary environment that is difficult to manoeuvre in reality.

Animation is a powerful storytelling medium because of its capacity to explore meaningful subjects in such a way that it captivates us. With that, Pixar strives to create stories with clear structure and purpose. Author Kenn Adams writes in *How to Improvise a Full-Length Play: The Art of Spontaneous Theater* about the *Story Spine* as the simple foundation of storytelling. The *Story Spine* is a model for a well-constructed story that includes a beginning (establish a routine), an event (break the routine), a middle (consequences of the broken routine), a climax and the resolution.⁵³ Former Pixar story artist Emma Coats outlines Adams' guideline as the fourth storytelling rule:

Once upon a time there was _____. Every day, _____. One day _____. Because of that, _____.
Because of that, _____. Until finally _____.⁵⁴

The *Story Spine*, outlined by Coats is a simplified version and offers a useful prompt within storytelling to propel the conceptualisation process. *Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling* offers other helpful story guidelines, such as rule fifteen:

If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.⁵⁵

Rule fifteen, for example, is present within the project because the character will respond to the negotiations of the practitioner with the subject matter (of death, loss, and the grieving process). The power of a story is the ability to connect with people on an emotional level. Writing and reflecting on what we know, our own lives and how we feel allows for a revived story. Director Pete Docter sums up this storytelling philosophy in the experience of directing *Monsters Inc.*:

The way I would pitch it is, it's about a monster who scares kids for a living. That's his job. He clocks in, he clocks out, he eats doughnuts and talks about union dues, and we thought that was a pretty funny idea. And sure enough, when I would tell it to people, they would smile. But when we told the story as a film, people started getting bored and restless, and they're like, "I don't understand what this movie's about." Well, what I finally figured out was that it's actually not about a monster who scares kids, it's about a man becoming a father. That was what was happening to me.⁵⁶

Pixar deals with emotional landscapes within their films based on their artist's lives, feelings and experiences. Writing about what we know is important because it makes us feel a certain way. When we tell a story, we want the audience to feel and dive into this experience communicated by the artist(s).

⁵³ Adams, Kenn. *How to Improvise a Full-Length Play: The Art of Spontaneous Theater*: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

⁵⁴ "Pixar Story Rules (2011)." Ferruccio Digital Works. <https://www.davidaprice.com/pixar-story-rules>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Pixar in a Box: Introduction to Storytelling*. Khan Academy Labs, 2017. 3m.
<https://www.khanacademy.org/computing/pixar/storytelling>.

Coco (2017)

Pixar's *Coco*⁵⁷ is a robust, recent example of animation's efficacy in communicating universal experiences of death through a specific cultural lens. The film is about celebration, family, love, and the emotions surrounding mortality. *Coco* engaged with familiar experiences of loss in an unfamiliar (from my perspective) cultural landscape – the Mexican context of *Día De Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead).⁵⁸ The film reframes death to celebrate life and culture and to live through remembrance. *Coco* informs the practice through a profound visual narrative that wrestles with a difficult subject while resonating with audiences (from my research perspective).


Presenting the topic in animation is also helpful because it gives form to a daunting conversation through potent storytelling devices. Death as a discussion extends beyond an eastern, western, or non-religious belief position because it transcends universally. The research also acknowledges cultural differences in approaches, and diverse understandings of death, celebration, and the potential afterlife. My contemplations on death are from my lived experiences, grounded in distinct cultural contexts to develop a library of symbols that resonate subjectively.

Coco is a profound display of adaptability for a visual narrative that can reach and resonate with an audience. Jean Baudrillard argues that, in western culture, the understanding of death has been filtered through science and medicine, implying that death is primarily a biological phenomenon. The author compares this to certain non-western cultures where death is a celebration of new life and has a symbolic relation to exchange with the living.⁵⁹ For example, the living can give and receive from the dead and vice versa, as showcased in *Coco* with offerings to the ancestors. Exploring this system of mutual exchange is fascinating because various cultures frame death differently and celebrate the experience as an acknowledgement of support, time to grieve, or accept mortality. Compare this to Western culture, where death often leans less towards spiritual dimension or articulation (in contrast). Perhaps this indicates the invasiveness of accepting a predominately clinical perspective and the existing problems associated with our understanding of death.

⁵⁷ *Coco*. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2017.


⁵⁸ 'Día de los Muertos' or 'The Day of the Dead' is a holiday that celebrates life and death, originating from Mexico.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*: Sage, 2016.



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Figure 6. Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, *Coco*, 2017, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.



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Figure 7. Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina, *Coco*, 2017, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.

***Soul* (2020)**

Pixar's *Soul* is about learning how to live. Joe Gardner is a music teacher who meets an untimely death right before his big break to play alongside jazz musicians. The film presents ideas around living that shift my thinking within the project and as a person. A significant point of contemplation was when Joe returned to life as a human being, starting back from where he left

off with newfound experiences in the soul realm. The film resonates and offers an intriguing take on why (in my opinion) Joe needs a second chance to live. Suppose, hypothetically, the ending poses that Joe dies while achieving his goal. In that case, it alludes to his dreams (while being alive) as the end-all, be-all.


At the film's end, Joe accepts the second chance to live. The audience is not told a concrete answer for how he will live, but the film visually shows his excitement in the step.⁶⁰ Joe's hyper-focus on purpose made him lose sight of the good in his life, including familial bonds, friendships and his educator role that inspires younger generations. The film suggests that existing is already a reason to live. Existing and being present in life is more significant than having the idealised, grandiose purpose people strive for in the human pursuit to be extraordinary. Leaving the possibilities vague and open-ended (when Joe accepts his second chance) allows the viewers to string together an answer for what it means to live. *Soul* is a film with different answers for different people based on their own thoughts and experiences. There is no correct answer to how to live, and Pixar presents a space to interpret that through the film and Joe's contemplations.



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Figure 8. Pete Docter, *Soul*, 2020, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.

⁶⁰ Hypothetically, what if Joe never fell through that sewer hole, which launches the out-of-body experience in the film. What if he hops over the hole and nails the gig instead? Would Joe still walk out pondering the same question with Dorothea (the jazz musician he aspires to work with) of "what next?". Suppose Joe dies with no character development or experience in the soul realm. In that case, I think he would gladly accept death because he has achieved his dream.



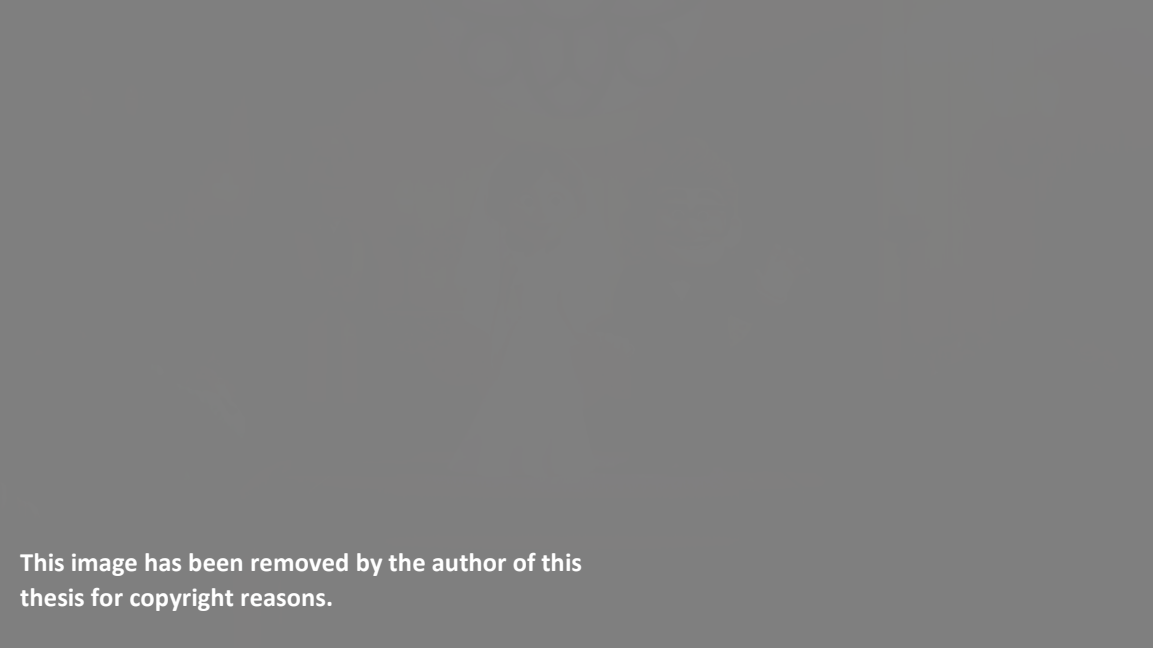
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Figure 9. Pete Docter, *Soul*, 2020, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.

***Up* (2009) - Opening montage as a short film of a life lived**


Up is the most compelling example of Pixar's storytelling philosophy and is done in the film's first ten minutes. The opening montage acts as a short film within a feature-length film. Directed by Pete Docter, *Up* captures a heart-breaking montage of Carl Fredricksen and his wife, Ellie. The montage looks into the duo's love, experiencing life's uncertainties and growing old together. At the same time, the feature-length film sets itself up to be an epic adventure. However, the opening truly delivers the heartbreak of losing someone you love.

Docter's most powerful shot in the montage occurs when Carl sits alone at Ellie's funeral. It is a direct visual reference to their wedding, shown in the first shot. The exact location now has different lighting, mood and colouring. Vibrancy, light, and the characters' youth contrast heavily with the funeral, which bleeds with maroon reds encapsulating an older, isolated Carl. The two opposing shots capture the time they celebrated their new journey together and ended apart. *Up's* combination, range and articulation of creative choices evoke an empathetic response from the viewer. Ellie dying is not the breaking point for our reactions. Instead, it is when Carl responds and is immensely affected by his loss. We can see how the world changes around him – it loses colour, light and vibrancy because he lost someone he loves. That loss also shapes how Carl interacts, views, and experiences the world throughout the film. It is a strategic application by Pixar to introduce our main character in despair, which builds a compelling narrative. The beginning of *Up*, viewed through this lens of a short film, is a critical piece of cinema that lacks cynicism.



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Figure 10. Pete Docter, *Up*, 2009, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.



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Figure 11. Pete Docter, *Up*, 2009, film still, Retrieved from Blu-ray Disc.


Sparkshorts - Pixar's Short film format

Sparkshorts is indie filmmaking within Pixar, offering a range of filmmakers a chance to create a short film. The various backgrounds of each director allow for radical ideas that culturally, ethnically, and thematically empower Pixar's line-up.⁶¹ *Sparkshorts* have constraints, such as a

⁶¹ "Introducing Pixar Sparkshorts." 1m, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J20kmqY28KI>.

lower budget, limited resources (for example, how many people work on the film) and a tighter deadline for delivery and completion (six months). The team works with a condensed but powerful story alongside an efficient pipeline to combat this. The approach highlights that Pixar can still create a film with its storytelling philosophy, even in a short film format.

One of the *Sparkshorts* clearly uses Pixar's emotive storytelling is *Float*⁶², directed by Bobby Rubio. The established storytelling mechanisms are observed through the seven-minute short because the main framework remains – to tell the story as experienced by the storyteller. The film's inspiration came from Rubio's experience as a father with an autistic son. In the film, the son can float, creating a visible difference among other children. The father loves his son wholeheartedly but is tested as concerns arise from what people will say or how they will respond (to his son). The film holds a heartfelt story about accepting, cherishing and choosing to love the most important people in our lives. Even though this is Rubio's story, it resonates with viewers because we look at it from his perspective. We identify with what he genuinely felt, possibly due to our own similar experiences, or sympathise with his feelings because they are transparent and well translated in the film.



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Figure 12. Bobby Rubio, *Float*, 2019, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JG7Xgy1akzl>

Sparkshorts continues to tell stories that do not fall short of emotion, creativity, and compelling aspects. If anything, this format further solidifies Pixar's storytelling philosophy – that it is adaptable to different film lengths.

Reflection on Pixar

In *Coco*, *Soul*, *Up* and *Float*, Pixar uses a specific framework involving experience, character, and emotion at the story's core. The emotional resonance of these films aligns with the emotional thinking *Dénouement* engages with, highlighting empathy and accessing emotions not easily

⁶² Rubio, Bobby. "Float." 7m. United States: Pixar, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

articulated. While the films have prominent differences in environments, character design and central conflicts, there are similar ideas that drive the intentions.

Dénouement is dynamically, aesthetically, and budget-wise different from Pixar's work. However, Pixar deeply informs the project through their thinking and making procedures for a heart-warming, potent film. As an animator, I explore the grieving process by drawing and animating feelings as I experience them. As a practitioner, I work alone and understand that I am not creating a Pixar film. Instead, *Dénouement* carries the storytelling aspects that tap into our emotions as examined through these respected works. Drawing upon Pixar's storytelling philosophy, the creative decisions within *Dénouement* will come through by engaging with the subject through the lens of a filmmaker, animator and a person experiencing loss.

Hand-drawn Animation

The project aims to utilise hand-drawn animation (also known as 2D or traditional animation) to articulate feelings of grief and loss associated with death. Paul Wells, in *Understanding Animation*, writes about his theoretical views on the concept of hyperrealism (the depiction of reality).⁶³ Wells brings forth an interesting discussion in that, to implicate reality, it must first seem real. As reality identifies with fantasy, an artificial environment can represent reality. Wells believes this concept of hyperrealism is prevalent in animation because animation is an illusion that replicates reality in some way, shape, or form.⁶⁴ Due to this concept, the project can provide a space where the character's reality and environment are a translation of the practitioner's (my own) reality and environment. Frank Thomas states that he would immerse himself in animation, almost as high-class escapism, into the magical land with the character he animated.⁶⁵ Whoever or whatever this character was, the animator spent time creating something between them both. For *Dénouement*, the animator meets this previously non-existent character through animating, giving them life and a subjective understanding of the world.


Wells argues that believability carries through the medium to create an evolved impression of realism. The author highlights the discussion from Umberto Eco, who describes the Disney theme parks as 'hyper-reality'. The comparison drawn is due to Disney theme parks simulating a utopia. The park is a fantasy space to meet beloved characters, admire spectacles, and dine extravagantly.⁶⁶ Without a clear distinction between fantasy and reality, the theme park is no longer just a convincing imitation of reality. As developed in Wells' work, hyperrealism defines a mode of animation that strives for realism. The paradox of representing reality in a medium envisioned through artificiality makes hyperrealism interesting to discuss because I am translating feelings into the illusionistic space of animation. *Dénouement* proposes that animation can further engage with complex feelings to grapple with loss while presenting it as a whimsical affective experience felt, acknowledged and accepted. A tactile, hand-drawn approach (drawing frame-by-frame) will allow a process of contemplation for my understanding of loss, death and grief. The translation through film allows the audience to engage with a more empathic and connected form of this conversation.

⁶³ Wells, Paul. *Understanding Animation* London, New York: Routledge, 1998.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁵ Thomas, Frank, Ollie Johnston, and Frank Thomas. *The illusion of life: Disney animation*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.

⁶⁶ Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays* 1st ed. California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.



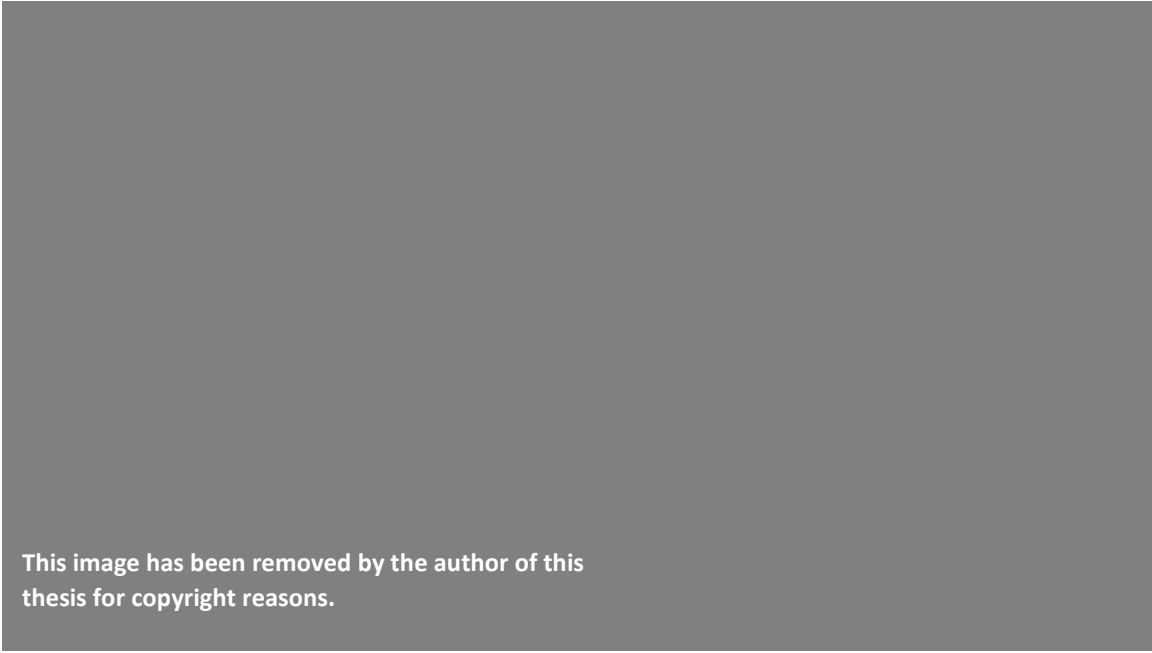
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Figure 13. Gary Andrews, *The Doodle Diaries*, 2019, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EEzLS3OLu8&feature=youtu.be>

In *The Doodle Diaries*, Gary Andrews channels loss, life and grief in a series of heartfelt sketchbook drawings, later turned into animation.⁶⁷ Andrews utilises drawing as an outlet for complicated feelings and strengthens the conversation about 2D's ability to elicit complex themes or emotions. The sketches follow Andrews' perspective to navigate the intensity of grief and adjustment to life after loss. A testament to how we all grieve differently, Andrews' approach was to draw about how he felt and then animate those drawings. The director draws specific illustrations later chosen to be the main shots in the animation.⁶⁸ *Dénouement's* approach is drawing feelings experienced by the practitioner (as they appear) and then translating them through the character into their own experience within their own animated reality.

⁶⁷ Andrews, Gary. "The Doodle Diaries." United Kingdom: BBC, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EEzLS3OLu8&feature=youtu.be>.

⁶⁸ Gleeson, Liz, and Gary Andrews. *Ep. 8 Gary Andrews on Love, Widowhood & the Doodle Diaries*. Podcast audio. Shapes of Grief 2019. <https://anchor.fm/shapes-of-grief/episodes/Ep--8-Gary-Andrews-on-Love--Widowhood--The-Doodle-Diaries-e3jfqh>.



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Figure 14. Gary Andrews, *The Doodle Diaries*, 2019, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EEzLS3OLu8&feature=youtu.be>

John Canemaker states that modern technology has the technical ability to interpolate between key drawings. However, it is still the animator's artistic talents that design the fluidity of motion and emotional impact of the animation.⁶⁹ Canemaker's writing aligns with the project's choice of frame-by-frame animation because the medium allows for an instinctual connection between the artist's head, heart, and hand. 2D prompts the audience to interpret the illusion of lines and the fabrication of a 'living' being (the character) within that space based on the impression of the artist's intention, the cinematic cues or the viewer's perspective.

2D animation within *Dénouement* utilises its inherent freedom of illusion and brings forth the abstract navigation of coping and grappling with loss. Glen Keane mentions that animation is about drawings that move people and suggests animating with sincerity. The artist encourages animators to believe in the character they animate – to think about the characters as real people, understand how they act, what motivates them or their intentions.⁷⁰ Essentially, the animator must enter the character's mind to animate the character successfully. Keane often refers to another respected animator, Ollie Johnston, who emphasises drawing what the character is thinking – not what the character is doing. Johnston states the following that aligns with the project and summarises the practitioner's approach with animation:

Always remember that you are not just animating movement, you are animating feelings
– think about what your character is thinking and why do they feel that way?⁷¹

⁶⁹ Kriger, Judith. *Animated Realism: A Behind the Scenes Look at the Animated Documentary Genre*: Taylor & Francis, 2012.

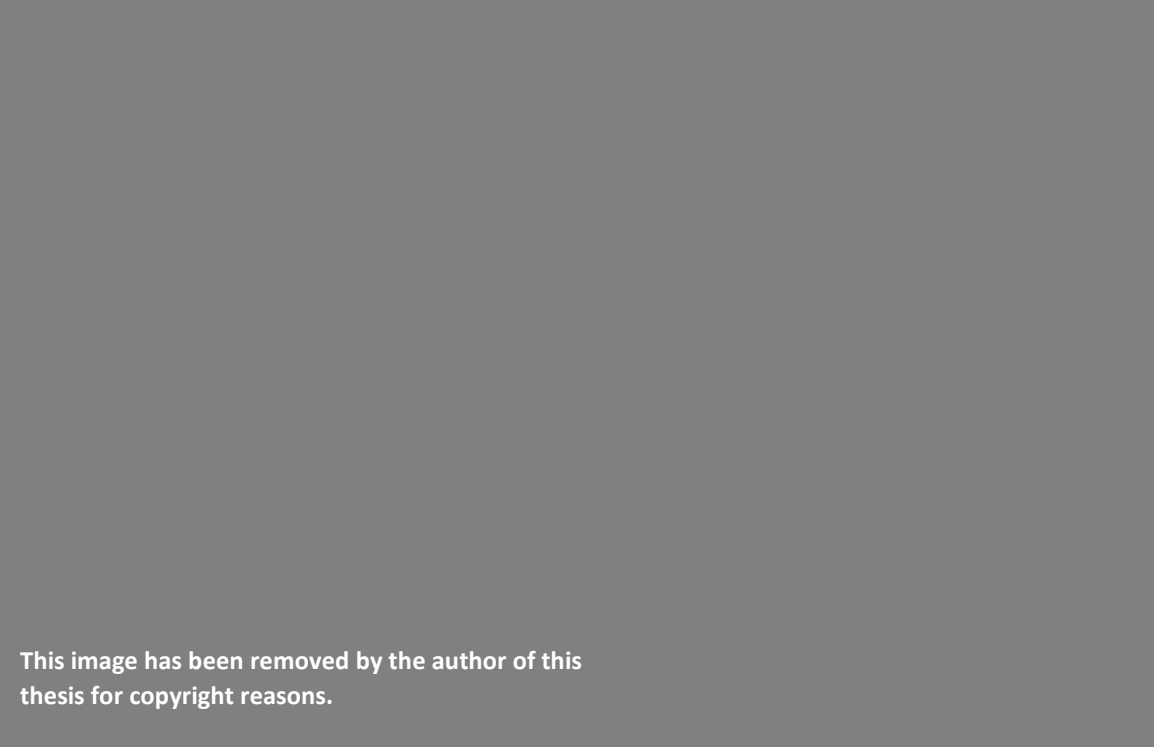
⁷⁰ Bancroft, Tom. *Creating Characters with Personality*: Watson-Guption, 2016.

⁷¹ Lasseter, John. *Principles of Traditional Animation Applied to 3d Computer Animation*. 1987.

Surrealism, Imagination and Experimental Animated Shorts

Un Chien Andalou (1929) - Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel

Throughout history, death's representation cultivates a collection of symbolism, dreamlike states, and imaginative depictions. An example is the short film, *Un Chien Andalou*⁷² by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. The film presents bizarre, disorienting and surreal imagery. With input from Dalí, a prominent figure in the Surrealist movement, Buñuel presents a bold mysterious set of shots that range from deep to possibly meaningless and are open to interpretation.⁷³



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Figure 15. Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929, film still, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB7gd_t6WMQ

Un Chien Andalou introduced something innovative, unsettling and creative to the cinema of its time. Undoubtedly, it made a lasting impact on my first viewing, thus informing my thinking throughout the project. Though cautioned about the film's graphic nature, it still manages to shock with provocative imagery that moves the viewer out of a comforting space. The film works with a surrealist space interested in the corporeal representation of death and the physical body's deterioration while relating to whimsical or strange dream states. In a discussion of the film, Allen Thiher writes:


Buñuel's first film is commonly understood either to be an unadulterated bit of nonsense or a symbol-laden exercise in hermeticism that only the initiated can understand. Neither

⁷² Luis Buñuel, and Salvador Dalí. "Andalusky Pes (Un Chien Andalou)." 16m, 1929. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB7gd_t6WMQ.

⁷³ Williams, Linda. "Dream Rhetoric and Film Rhetoric: Metaphor and Metonymy in Un Chien Andalou." (1981).

of these ideas is entirely false, but neither is adequate for a full comprehension of one of the most important films of the avant-grade.⁷⁴

Surrealism helps in thinking about the world differently because it presents the world strangely or outlandishly. As the viewer, I may not be able to elucidate all the meanings, symbology and visuals, nor was that the filmmaker's intent, this charm that situates the radical use of surrealism in the short film. *Un Chien Andalou* contemplates another state of thinking around its subject matter with visuals of a graphic nature. It differs from the aims of *Dénouement*, which has incredibly potent, alluring, and abstract visuals that can shock the audience, although not in a graphic way. Both approaches leave an impression on the viewer. The choices carried out to conceive the films' work in their own intriguing way.



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Figure 16. Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929, film still, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB7gd_t6WMQ

From a subjective perspective, the arresting nature of the imagery in *Un Chien Andalou* can link to our arresting experience of death in a medical context. For example, suppose we end up in a hospital. In that case, we may encounter confusion, graphic experiences, and discomfort – much like the experience of viewing or entering the world of *Un Chien Andalou*. Personally, in the context of death, the repeating visuals of the body's decay elicit a sense of fear, which is a corporeal affect. Regarding dreamlike states that surrealism lends itself to, dreams are where I process the fear of loss and reexperience loss. I argue that we often see dreamlike representations of death (as seen in films such as *A Matter of Life and Death*⁷⁵) because, as a complex experience,

⁷⁴ Thiher, Allen. "Surrealism's Enduring Bite:" *Un Chien Andalou*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1977): 38-49.

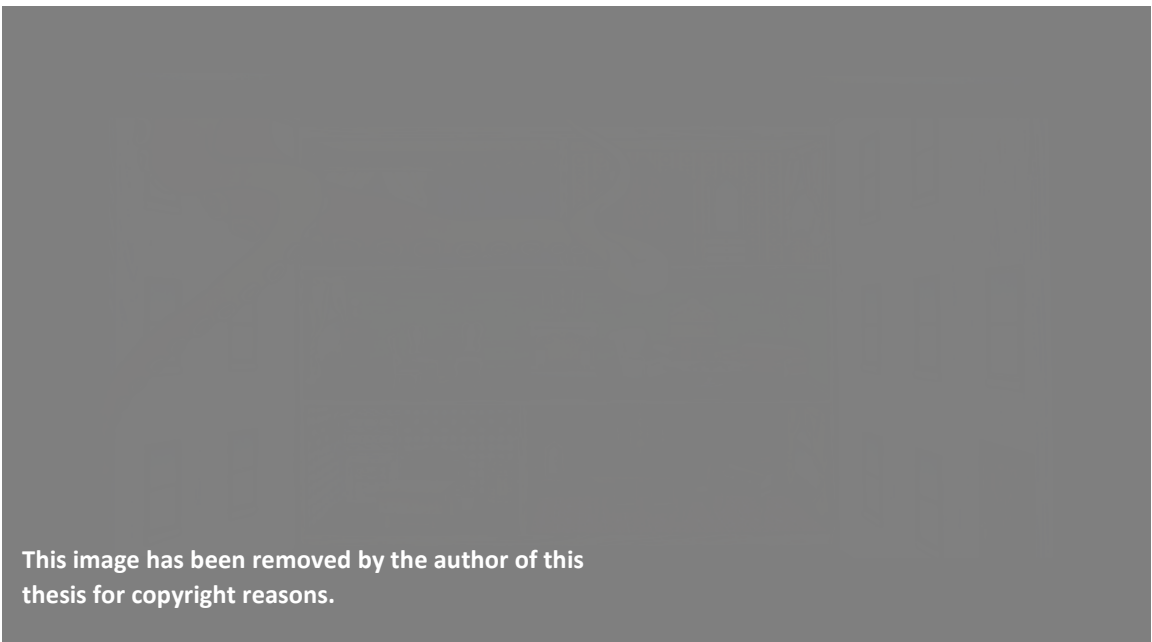
⁷⁵ Powell, Michael, and Emeric Pressburger. "A Matter of Life and Death." 104m. United Kingdom: Eagle-Lion Films (UK), 1946.

we struggle to face it in our real state of being. In Chapter Four, I discuss the experience of nightmares that regularly conjure realistic visuals of losing loved ones. The dreams/nightmares are tormenting, but it also provides striking, emotional and abstract imagery to inform the visuals in *Dénouement*.

Un Chien Andalou presents provocative imagery that is graphic, bleakly offensive and uncomfortable which is a fascinating approach by the directors. There is a strangeness in surrealism, which I aim to draw out in my work, even if the final animation is not as viscerally confronting. *Un Chien Andalou* strongly informs the choices about developing imaginative imagery, drifting away from a literal representation to one that is more fluid and abstract.

***dolefullhouse* (2007) – Tabaimo**

A conversation about the potential of surrealism, imagination and experimental animation cannot overlook Tabaimo's work. As mentioned in Chapter One, Tabaimo creates large-scale animated installations that are interactive. The artist's panoramic installation, *dolefullhouse*⁷⁶, uses a dollhouse to represent the human body through a stunning animated sequence. The outside world thrashes through the house's openings as an invader, by characters such as an octopus. The meaning of the work changes from person to person, strengthening the idea of subjectivity in opinion, resonance and the experience of art. In a discussion on *dolefullhouse*, Tabaimo speaks about how she begins without a preconceived idea.⁷⁷ Consequently, the meaning forms through the interactions of various elements within the animation. Tabaimo asks viewers to form their own interpretations and not search for the artist's intentions. This approach resonates with *Dénouement* because everyone in the audience can interpret the animation in their own way.




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Figure 17. Tabaimo, *dolefullhouse*, 2007, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/tabaimo-mekurumeku/>

⁷⁶ Tabaimo. "Dolefullhouse." 2007. <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/tabaimo-dolefullhouse-short/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Tabaimo explains that “metaphors do not distinctly refer to anything and are similar to keys for a door”.⁷⁸ The artist mentions that these ‘keys’ (the metaphors) have the potential to unlock something for the viewer. While making *dolefulhouse*, Tabaimo spontaneously threw ideas together to test for new exciting outcomes. The artist mentions it is comparable to consistently throwing things on a blank page during the early stages. As the elements emerged, they were independent entities. Tabaimo focused on creating a connection with those vastly different elements to intertwine or morph them into something else. Tabaimo’s working style inspires *Dénouement*’s approach to conceiving ideas and encourages the viewer to interpret the work authentically.



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Figure 18. Tabaimo, *dolefullhouse*, 2007, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/tabaimo-mekurumeku/>


***Pas de deux* (1968) - Norman McLaren**

As an experimental filmmaker, Norman McLaren’s work appeals to the senses regardless of the subject matter, working with abstract and representational imagery.⁷⁹ In particular, *Pas de deux*⁸⁰ is captivating because McLaren films the live-action footage and multiplies the image onto itself (similar to photographic multi-exposure). The specificity for the image multiplication ensures that the second and subsequent images are not identical to the first. The graceful multi-lined figures are alluring to watch as they slow time down, making us focus and appreciate each subsequent frame. Movement within the film allows the viewer to see multiple images, such as a body part multiplied. Thus, it presents one graceful motion unfolding into a cascade of limbs.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jordan, William E. "Norman McLaren: His Career and Techniques." *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 8, no. 1 (1953): 1-14.

⁸⁰ McLaren, Norman. "Pas De Deux." 13m, 1968. <https://vimeo.com/40184263>.



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Figure 19. Norman McLaren, *Pas de deux*, 1968, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WopgmACy5XI>

In the film, McLaren successfully portrays inner conflict about whether to show concern for oneself or another person. The main dancer is first focused on their own image until the second dancer appears, which propels the physical union with one another. Following that, we see cascading images of the two dancers in motion. McLaren's creativity, sense of timing and production structure make *Pas de deux* a visually impactful film, with the constant unfurling of body movement. *Dénouement* works with similar visual imagery (in 2D) as it shows the body moving gracefully within the film. McLaren's work inspires the project to tactfully utilise monochromatic visuals to show the delicate form of anatomy, breaking it apart, distilling the image to make it more alluring.

The film-making process in *Pas de deux* parcelled out into distinct stages of shooting, processing and editing. The multiple image effects are carefully considered for each frame and emphasise McLaren's meticulous planning and creative constraints within the film. Maynard Collins discussed an example of considerations when it came to the image effects:

The multiple image effects for *Pas de deux* had to be very carefully worked out frame-by-frame for every image. If there's (sic) twelve images on the frame, and if you have got twenty-four frames per second, you've got to account for these on a sheet for the optical camera operator, so he knows exactly what to do.⁸¹

McLaren's approach to the film's visuals allowed control for each frame, so "the possibility of image manipulation according to the artist's aim was maximized".⁸² I respond to McLaren's film because, as an independent filmmaker, he often works with constraints out of necessity to create efficient procedures or use specific techniques. Due to the nature of *Dénouement*, creative


⁸¹ Collins, Maynard. *Norman McLaren*. Vol. 1. Canadian Film Institute, 1976.

⁸² Dobson, Terence. "The Film-Work of Norman McLaren." (1994): 100-95. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.26021/4243>.

constraints (discussed in Chapter Three) set up a clear scope of what is feasible as the sole filmmaker. Terence Dobson states why McLaren chose to work in a specific way, as follows:

...it was successful for him. He found it suited his analytical approach, and produced films that he felt were effective. They broke new ground, and were both visually and aurally intriguing, fascinating and literally excited the observer.⁸³

Many of McLaren's innovations and modes of working are adopted by other practitioners due to his impressive film legacy, touches of surrealism and successes in creativity. In response, *Dénouement* is informed by McLaren's detailed thinking, enthusiasm for innovation and meticulous planning.



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Figure 20. Norman McLaren, *Pas de deux*, 1968, film still, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WopgmACy5XI>

***Tusalava* (1929) - Len Lye**

Len Lye is an experimental filmmaker who pushed the boundaries of language for our eyes and ears. *Tusalava*,⁸⁴ filmed with a 35mm animation camera, is inspired by the indigenous art of Australian, Polynesian and Maori cultures. The short film remains cryptic about “the beginnings of organic life”, with cellular forms that grow and interact across two distinct vertically-formatted panels (one black, one white), evoking themes of transformation, birth, death and sex.⁸⁵ *Tusalava* consists of a pulsating spirograph-like pattern disrupted by the creature's form. Subjectively, it presents as a cell or virus that mutates into a humanoid, and this evolution leads to conflict. After

⁸³ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁴ Lye, Len. "Tusalava." 10m. United Kingdom, 1929. Animation. <http://www.lenlyefoundation.com/films/tusalava/66/>.

⁸⁵ Kashmere, Brett. "Len Lye." *Senses of Cinema* vol.43 (2007): 1-2.

another viewing, I reinterpreted the film's interest in biological yet symbolic imagery as some sort of lifeform consumed by an evolved self.

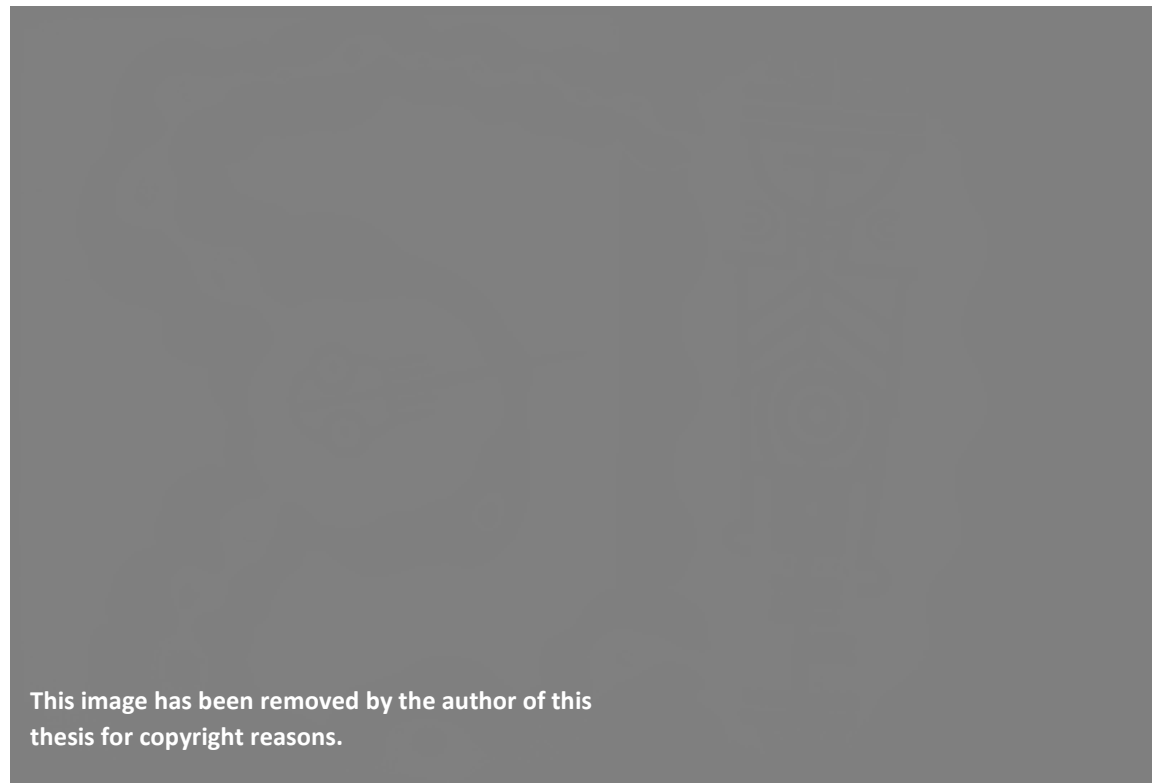


Figure 21. Len Lye, *Tusalava*, 1929, film still, Retrieved from <http://www.lenlyefoundation.com/films/tusalava/66/>

Brett Kashmere, in a discussion of Lye, writes:

This indexical relationship between the essence of “selfness” and our corporeal reality accounts for Lye's creation of imagery and forms that represent bodily feelings and motion, as well as his keen interests in music (especially jazz) and dance. Lye's sense of movement was rooted in the physical, “the kinetic of the body's rhythms”, not purely a matter of visual patterns.⁸⁶

Lye worked on the film for two years and completed over nine thousand five hundred drawings, photographed individually in the *cel*⁸⁷ animation process. In talking about the inspiration and reason for the film, Lye states that he “doodled to assuage” and had a “hunger for some hypnotic image I’d never seen before” that drew upon Maori, Aboriginal, and Samoan tradition.⁸⁸ Lye experimented with scraps of film from the editing room, which led him to discover more efficient modes of making the film. The artist approached the film using tools, such as Indian arrowheads, dental tools, and “painting onto each film frame to produce abstract animation”⁸⁹. This dedication to scratching physical, organic, tactile imagery onto film frames showcases Lye’s experimental approach to filmmaking.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ A *cel* or celluloid is a transparent sheet on which is drawn or painted on for traditional, hand-drawn animation.

⁸⁸ Krasner, Jon. *Motion Graphic Design: Applied History and Aesthetics*. Routledge, 2013. https://www.academia.edu/40915339/A_Brief_History_of_Motion_Graphics.

⁸⁹ Horrocks, Roger. *Art the Moves: The Work of Len Lye*. Auckland University Press, 2013.

Dénouement's transitional moments (within the animation) tease a new way to present, connect and move between ideas - taking inspiration from Lye's movement between symbols, form, or ideas. The challenge is to ensure the shots move elegantly between each other through simplified form, lines and shapes. Lye explains his interest in motion and movement drives his practice. While cloud watching, the artist had an epiphany:

As I was looking at those clouds I was thinking, wasn't it John Constable, the early English landscape painter, who sketched clouds to try and convey their motions? That's right! Well, I thought, why clouds, why not just motion? Why pretend they are moving, why not just move something? All of a sudden it hit me why not just movement? If there was such a thing as composing music, there could be such a thing as composing motion. After all, there are melodic figures, why can't there be figures of motion? Like the figure eight, for instance, and various other figures.⁹⁰

Lye also informed the thinking around transitions because the idea of "composing motion", as we would compose music, struck a chord with *Dénouement*. The transitions within the film arise from testing and coping through making, which activates curiosity to design *Dénouement* as a looping narrative structurally (discussed in Chapter Four). The narrative has a powerful underlying idea that time is a flowing, seamless loop of motion, following similar sentiments with Lye's interest.

Conclusion of Contextual Review

Throughout time artists, theorists, and practitioners have thought about our corporeal disintegration, evident in the research findings of Chapters One and Two. The research leaned heavily on thinking and artist practices related to the contexts (reframing death or dealing with challenging subjects) to counterpoint some of the more clinical and philosophical musings encountered. This conversation between thinker-writers and maker-thinkers proved helpful in developing thoughts and feelings about death, loss, and grief. The following chapter discusses how these contexts in action manifest as methods and the methodology underpinning the making and this project.

⁹⁰ Curnow, Wystan, Roger Horrocks, and Len Lye. *Figures of Motion: Len Lye, Selected Writings*. Auckland University Press, 1984.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

The research project *Dénouement* practices the medium of hand-drawn animation as a tactile means for the researcher to reflect upon the experience of losing a loved one. The making process (through drawing and animating) has supported me, as the researcher-person, to cope with this difficult subject throughout the production process. As I proceed with the work, I can see my emotions and sensations manifest in the iterations of practice. This chapter summarises the methods selected to address the project's aims, negotiate the research question, and explain the mixed-methodological framework for the project.

The production of *Dénouement* drew upon various methods discovered during reviews of established methodological approaches. Autoethnography supports the making, thinking, and feeling processes, and Dramaturgy supports visual and textual analysis. Practical tools found in the discipline of 2D animation (ideation drawing and iterative drawing) have shaped the making methods. These methods are refined by developing a production pipeline and explicitly establishing creative constraints for this project. The selected methods guided my decision-making throughout the creative process. They provided a means to reflect critically upon the work as it progressed and develop a production pipeline specific to the research aims. This methods chapter provides a scaffold for Chapter Four (Documentation of Practice) and includes a description and critical study of these methods in action (methodology).

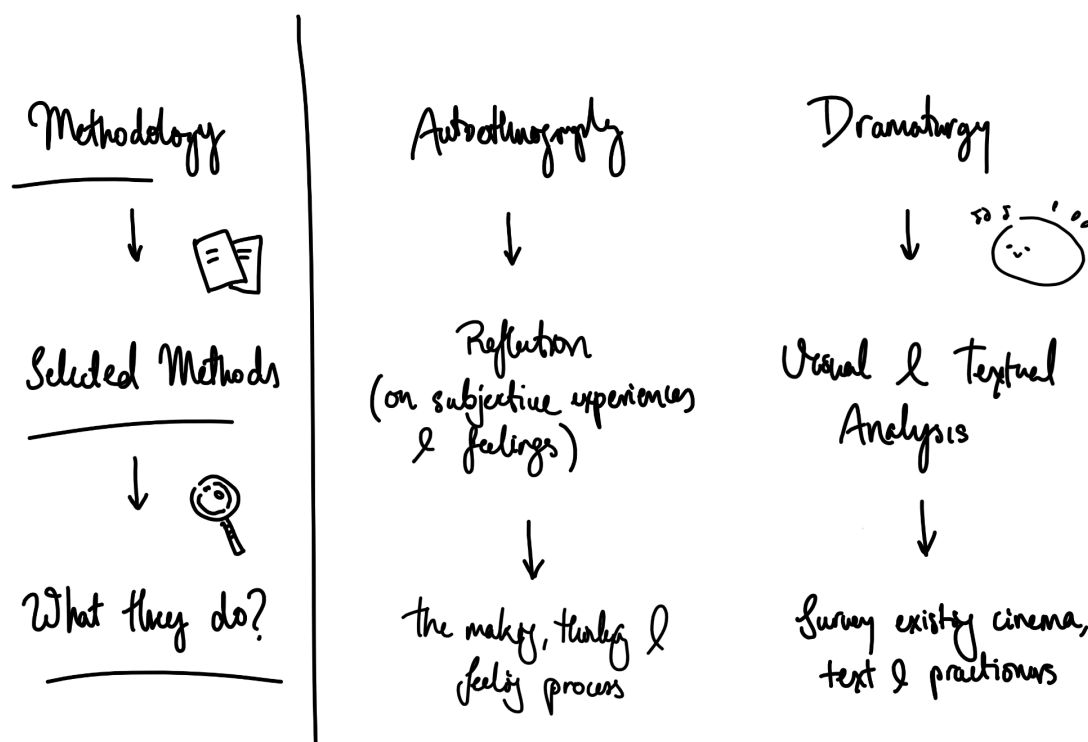


Figure 22. Lesley Ung. *Visualise methods in a diagram*, 2022, digital illustration, Auckland

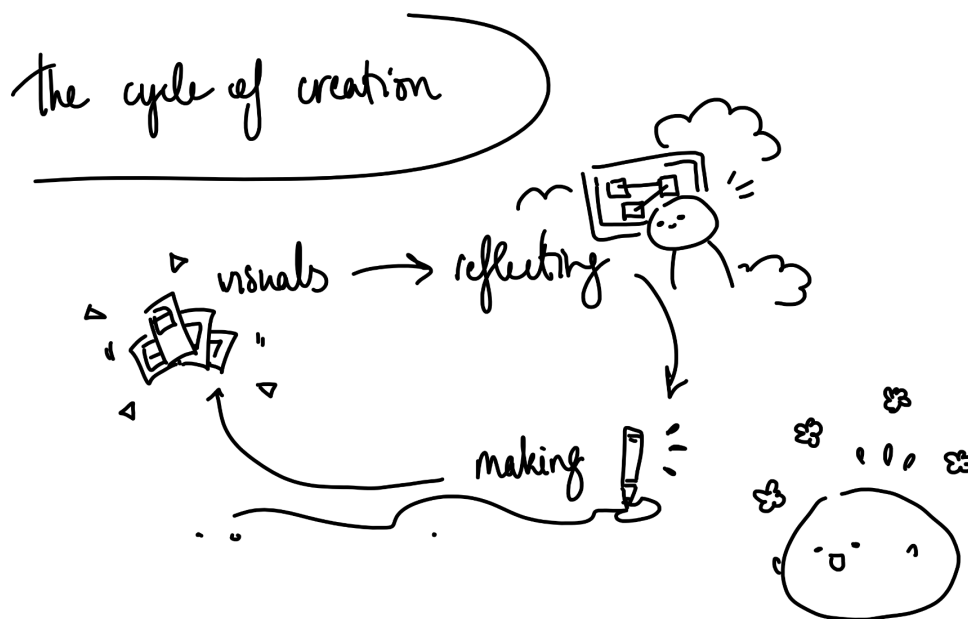


Figure 23. Lesley Ung. *The cycle of creation*, 2022, digital illustration, Auckland

Autoethnography as the making, thinking and feeling process

Dénouement has harnessed selected (reflective) autoethnographic methods to draw the thinking and feeling into the making processes. Autoethnography uses the researcher's personal experience as a living dataset to describe, analyse, and understand cultural experiences. It involves a self-narrative that connects an autobiographical story with a social context.⁹¹ These approaches informed the making, thinking, and feeling process as a contemplative tool for establishing the researcher's subjectivity in the work.

As discussed in Chapter One, affect within the project concerns my grieving process in response to loss. From the researcher's position, the project has provided a new way for me to see and feel. The shift in thinking because of affective experiences has helped direct the choices discussed further in Chapter Four. Brian Massumi writes:

A thinking of perception in perception, in the immediacy of its occurrence, as it is felt—a thinking-feeling, in visual form.⁹²

Massumi highlights that we need to feel the world to experience it at its fullest potential and what we feel will reroute our senses to think differently. The creative processes lean on reflective methods in autoethnography because the making, thinking and feeling process is key to the

⁹¹ Ellis, Carolyn, Stacy Holman Jones, and Tony E. Adams. *Autoethnography (Understanding Qualitative Research)*. Vol. 12. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁹² Massumi, Brian. "Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts (Technologies of Lived Abstraction)." (2011): 4

project's aims to engage with a complex subject. The very action of animating helped the navigation of complex feelings as they arose. Autoethnographic inquiry supported critical reflection on subjective feelings and experiences as I engaged with making and thinking processes. The making, thinking and feeling process allows my project to respond to the collective affective experience (of losing a loved one), and affective components transmit through translated feelings (of these emotional experiences).

Autoethnography has the capacity to provoke viewers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on experiences, enter empathically into the lives of others, and actively participate in dialogue regarding the social implications of the encountered.⁹³

Following this sentiment from Ellis and Bochner, Jeremy Blair highlights that the combination of animated autoethnography allowed further expansion of his practice. Blair encourages other practitioners to do the same in developing their personal stories.⁹⁴ He claims that, initially, autoethnography felt constrained within the articulation of solely the written form. The animator, therefore, fuses animation, a visual medium, alongside his autoethnographic reflections.⁹⁵ Blair's description of making connects with the intent of my practice:

Animation's frame-by-frame process allows the animator to reflect on and manipulate each individual image in the film. This type of dissection and reflection can encourage insights that would otherwise remain static or hidden. Autoethnographers can similarly dissect specific moments of life through inquiry and discover the minute details and communications that defined those moments or relationships. As evidenced later in this study, stop motion animation, combined with the autoethnographic research method, can encapsulate, celebrate, and reinterpret experiences.⁹⁶

The research combines transparent vulnerabilities celebrated in autoethnographic inquiry with the medium of 2D animation for storytelling to draw out feelings visually. The animation aims to provide a space for potential critical reflection so the viewer can see themselves (within my discoveries) in their own way.

⁹³ Ellis, Carolyn, and Art Bochner. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject." (2000): 733-68.

⁹⁴ Blair, Jeremy Michael. "Animated Autoethnographies: Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evaluation." *Art Education* 67, no. 2 (2014): 6-13.

⁹⁵ Blair, Jeremy Michael. *Animated Autoethnographies: Using Stop Motion Animation as a Catalyst for Self-Acceptance in the Art Classroom*: University of North Texas, 2015.

⁹⁶ Blair, 6.



Figure 24. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard Frame*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Drawing on subjective experiences of the researcher as part of an autoethnographic approach fitted the project's nature. This process drew out my thinking based on a subjective understanding of loss, from tacit knowledge as an animator and educator, external research interests in the subject, and my own lived experience. The action of making animations offered a comfortable space where I could extract my understanding of death, loss, and grief personally. The discomfort associated with the subject matter was comforted by a familiar, enjoyable medium I study, practice, and teach.

The following questions guided the autoethnographic inquiry to underpin the methodological framework, driving choices in the making:

- What is death? What is death to me?
- How does animation, as a tool, enable reflection on death, loss and grief?
- How has my understanding of death, loss and grief changed through animation?
- What do I feel? What does that look like, and how could this feeling be symbolised?
- What if I experience these raw feelings as they introduce themselves? The feelings just needed to be as they are, and I would let them be.
- How is my character responding to my feelings within the making? How do they translate this within their world (the animation)?
- Who am I creating for when I create? Am I creating for the little girl in me, enamoured by animation? The distressed adult me who is struggling with the experience of loss? The fictional person I am giving life to (the character)?



Figure 25. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard Frame*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 26. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard Frame*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Blair states the bridge between life experiences and our artistic work supports the notion that life is a “strong and viable source of data”, which we should utilise.⁹⁷ As a result, Blair’s approach informed the reflectiveness within my project’s making, thinking, and feeling process.

⁹⁷ Blair, 6.

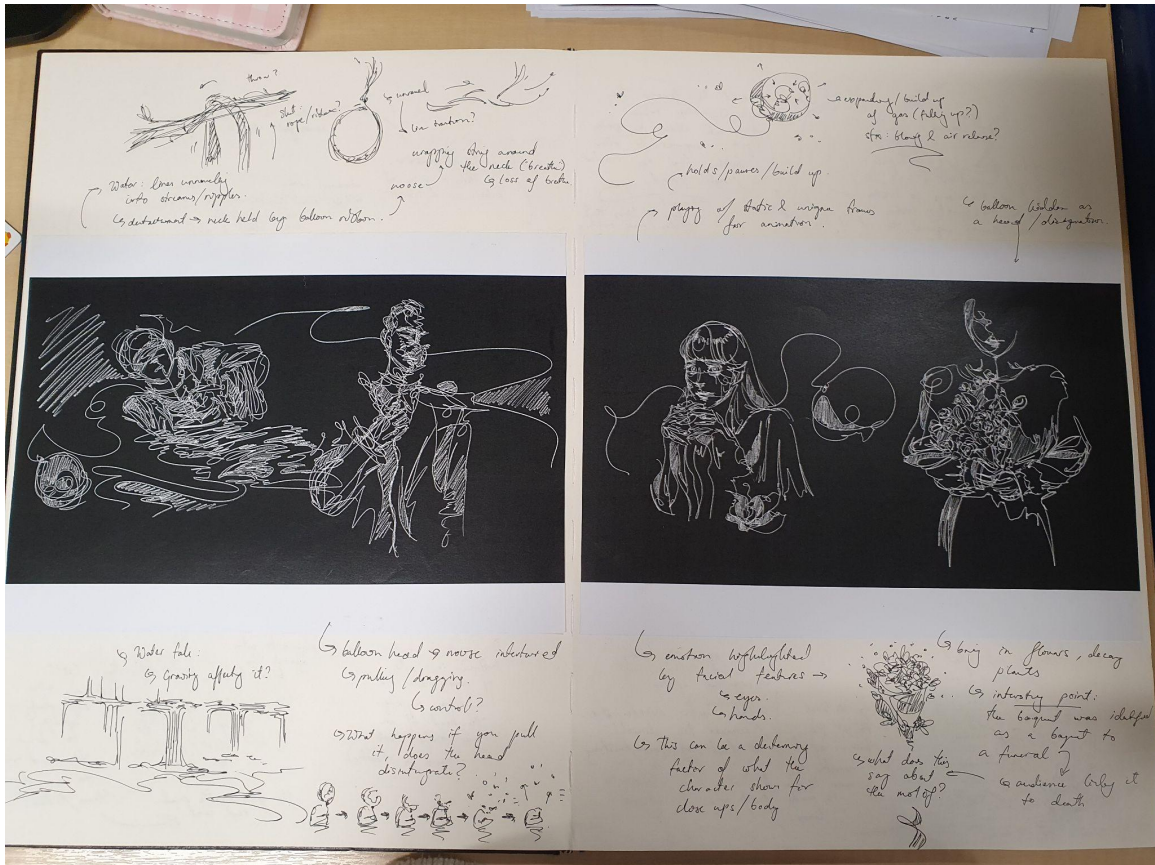


Figure 27. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation - Illustrations Reflection*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

The documentation of my feelings, thoughts, and ideas was parcelled into physical, tactile forms to encourage reflection. These included physical copies of my work, a physical A3 workbook journal (See Appendix 1) and a bulletin board. As an animator captivated by hand-drawn animation, this method of harnessing autoethnographic reflections supported my thinking-making process. For example, I started to tease out aesthetic and narrative choices, which gave form to my feelings, allowing me to understand my views and how they manifested over the years. Chapter Four demonstrates autoethnographic reflection aligned with other methods (used during the practice), such as ideation drawing and journaling.

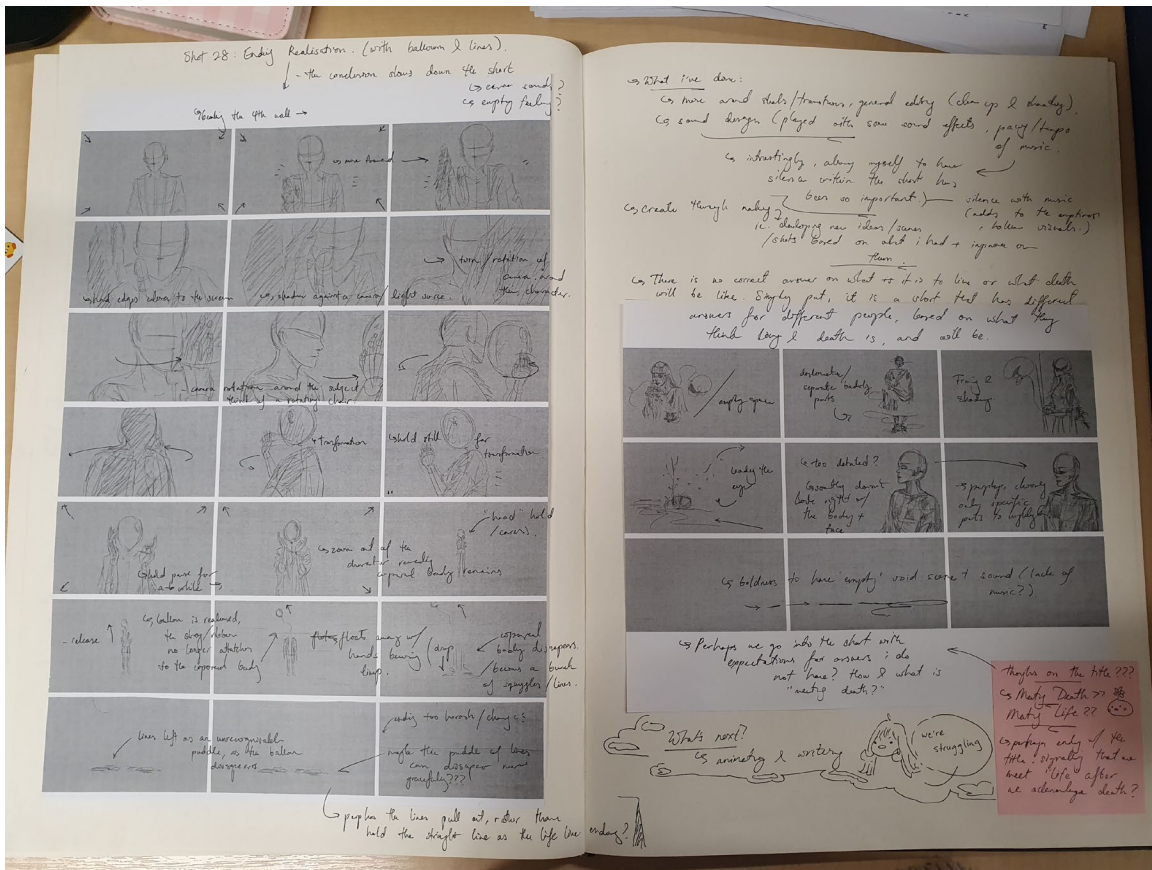


Figure 28. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation - Drawn over Storyboards*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

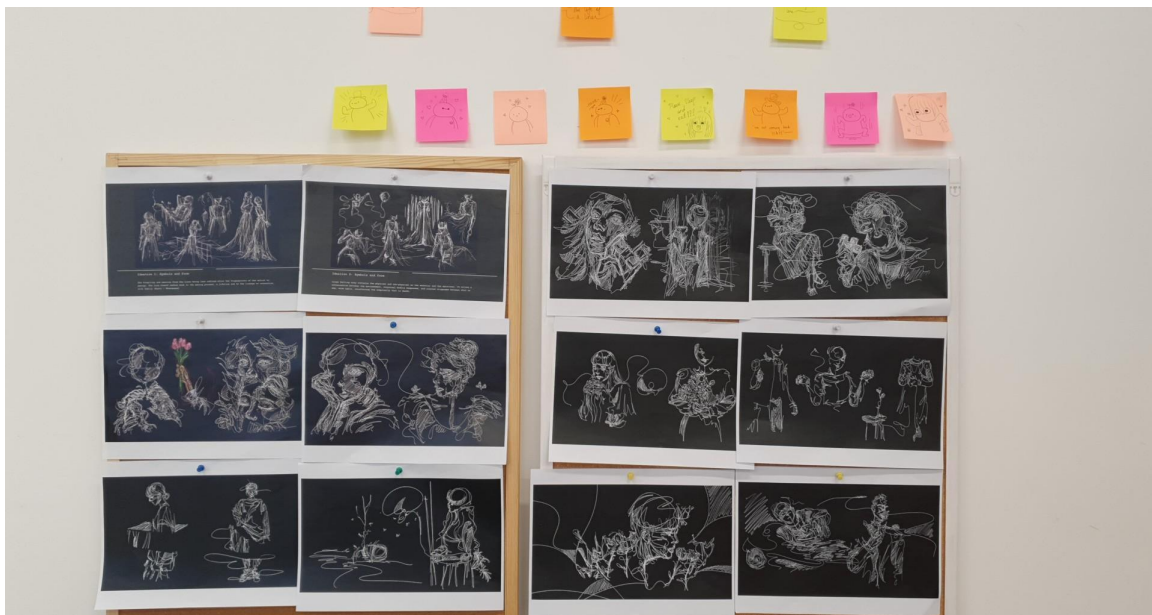


Figure 29. Lesley Ung. *Bullet Board - During 2020*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

Rather than relying on interviews, observations or statistics, Autoethnography as the making, thinking and feeling process allows a transparent (and vulnerable) view of the researcher (as the

subject/participant) and their self-reflections as viable data. In Chapter Two, I discussed Pixar's Storytelling approach. Director Pete Docter sums up the importance of effective storytelling by translating the human condition because people can relate as human beings. Docter states that stories built on personal experiences can connect audiences with the emotional aspects of those experiences.⁹⁸ Our awareness to recognise or acknowledge feelings within experiences leads to great storytelling. It attempts to genuinely bring the viewer into the experience, which refers back to autoethnographic inquiry because it reflects the subjective experience through the making and uses that experience to propel the narrative.

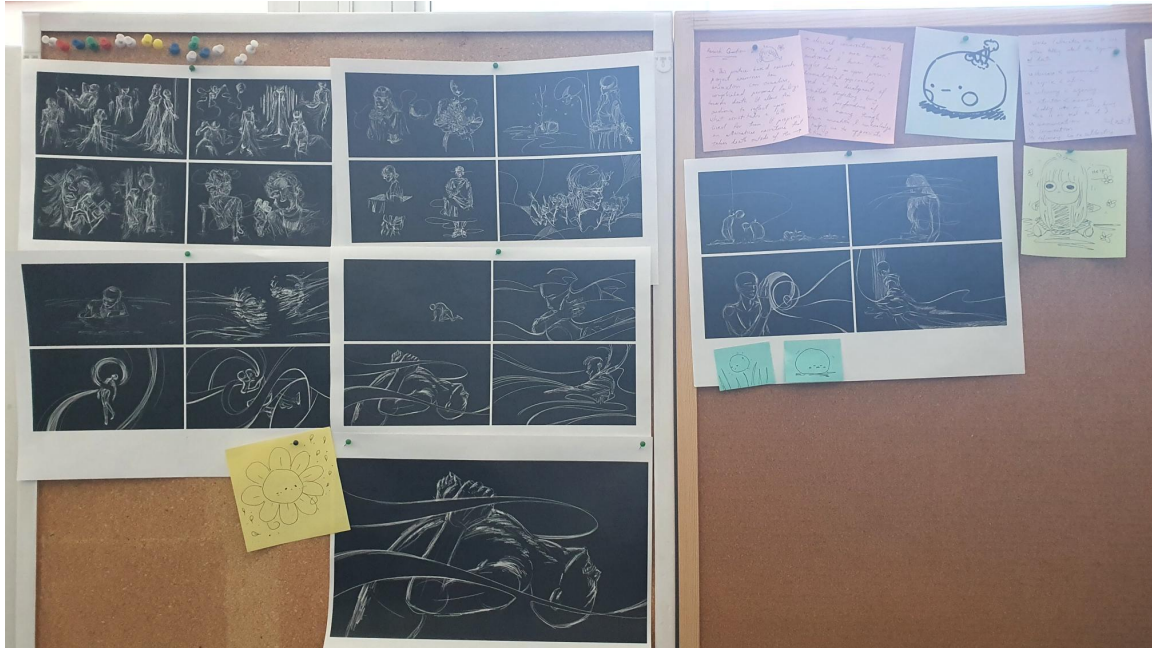


Figure 30. Lesley Ung. *Bullet Board - During 2021, 2021*, photograph, Auckland

Dramaturgy for Visual and Textual Analysis

Dramaturgy describes a methodology in the theatre's construction, acting and performance, dance, or cinema.⁹⁹ The translation of authentic experiences or ideas into a story through a dramaturgical method is crucial for my practice. I employed dramaturgy as a mode to script out visual communication through illustration within *Dénouement*. Visual and Textual Analysis allowed me to engage other tools, such as storyboarding and formalising the communication of the research.

The traditional form of dramaturgy is derived from theatre and is used in films because it provides a more in-depth cinema experience.¹⁰⁰ I applied Visual and Textual Analysis to survey how other existing texts, films and artists have engaged with difficult topics, such as death. *Drinking for*

⁹⁸ "Pixar in a Box: Introduction to Storytelling." 3m Khan Academy Labs, 2017. <https://www.khanacademy.org/computing/pixar/storytelling>.

⁹⁹ Benford, Robert, and A Hare. "Dramaturgical Analysis." *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.32046-3>.

¹⁰⁰ Koivumäki, Marja-Riitta. "Dramaturgical Approach in Cinema – Elements of Poetic Dramaturgy in A. Tarkovsky's Films." Aalto University, 2016.

*England*¹⁰¹ is an example of dramaturgical Visual and Textual Analysis, as it explores attitudes regarding alcohol consumption in English society. The documentary took a real-world problem and shifted the focus to dealing with that problem. Through interviews, recitals of poetry, and song, the film reframes an idea that exists into a contemporary context that welcomes analysis. Practitioners, such as Francisco Goya and director Pete Doctor (mentioned in Chapters One and Two), also take real-life experiences and translate them through a narrative experience in art or cinema (which is a dramaturgical method in itself).



Figure 31. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - Moths*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Visual and Textual Analysis allowed me to engage with the way other films and artists have worked with the difficult subject matter. The work is not limited to (the subject matter of) death and touches on the presentation and navigation of uncomfortable subjects. This aspect of dramaturgy as a method relied on the contextual works that have informed the making and reflection on choices to develop my practice further. A mode of storytelling is reviewing aesthetics and visual communication of ideas.¹⁰² As a filmmaker, films expanded my use of visual language and allowed the valuable tool of tacit connections to emerge. The moth, for example, is a recurring symbol I understood to represent a visit from a loved one to the living. As the moth may have a more significant symbolic gesture in my work, I would take notes about how I felt and what I drew.

Evidently, the project drew upon the dramaturgical method of Visual and Textual Analysis to approach storytelling development, highlighting the organisation of ideas to test through animation.

¹⁰¹ Hill, Brian. "Drinking for England." United Kingdom: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1998.

¹⁰² Kain, Richard M. "The Limits of Literary Interpretation." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2 (1958): 214-18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/427523>.

Making Methods:

This section discusses the practical tools found in the discipline of 2D animation, such as ideation drawing and iterative drawing. The making methods consist of thinking through drawing and drawing through thinking to tease out ideas and discoveries.

Ideation Drawing

Ideation is the mode of the design process that concentrates on idea generation and may include techniques of brainstorming, sketching or prototyping.¹⁰³ Ideation Drawing, in particular, is the process that generates ideas or solutions through drawing or sketching.¹⁰⁴ The discovery of a character, mood, or stylisation can be through sketching and the documentation of that development. As an animator and visual learner, this method was valuable because it allowed me to parcel out ideas into visual form. Whether it was to sketch a composition for a frame, the form of the character, or potential symbols, Ideation Drawing allowed me to tease out ideas within the conceptual, animation, and post-production stages. In other words, I employed drawing as a way to create, detail, expand and explore ideas.

Welby Ings states that drawn approaches to designing film narratives can empower the designer.¹⁰⁵ In the short film *Munted*, the filmmaker suggests that drawn approaches to the design of film narratives have the potential to enable the designer to reach with the ideation and pull out the informative content and appearance of the text.¹⁰⁶ Ideation Drawing informed the project as I fleshed out elements into illustrations, such as the aesthetic stylisation or character. It is also an example of visual dramaturgy that teased the story out through a practical method, which is well suited for the medium of animation. Another prompt for my drawing sessions included the use of words associated with death, loss and grief. This exercise produced ideation, such as pencil tests of anger (referring to the *Five Stages of Grief*) and symbols relating to death. The process drew out how I interpreted these words at the beginning of the research.

¹⁰³ Schenk, Pam. "Inspiration and Ideation: Drawing in a Digital Age." *Design Issues* 30, no. 2 (2014): 42-55.

¹⁰⁴ Ings, Welby. "Drawing as Thought: Ideation in Narrative Film Design." *Artifact* 3, no. 2 (2014): 2.1-2.10.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14434/artifact.v3i2.3983>.

¹⁰⁵ Ings, Welby. "Drawing into Being: Ideation as Multimodal Thinking." *Journal Multimodal Communication* 1, no. 3 (2012): 211-31.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.



Figure 32. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard Still - Tombstone*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Iterative Drawing

Drawing, referred to as 'iterative', means the drawing focuses on creating new variations and constant testing.¹⁰⁷ The method allowed discovery about what works and offered a space to discover new imagery. It also provided a framework to develop skills as an animator through meticulous illustrations with detailed line work or quick thumbnail sketches to have a sense of the composition.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Tabaimo reaffirms that drawing is essential to her process because it allows her ideas to “percolate”.¹⁰⁸ In other words, Tabaimo utilises drawing throughout the process of creating animations to rework or reimagine the ideas constantly. As the research develops, it is crucial to create new iterations based on previous ideas or illustrations. The shift from early clinical conceptions to frame death into an emotional understanding of my subjective experience evolved from the reimagined illustrations.

As a method, Iterative Drawing was essential for engagement within the 2D animation process during different stages of the production pipeline. For example, the pre-production phase allowed for refinement and articulation of concepts through iterative drawing, reflecting how I wanted to translate my subjective navigation of loss.

The different stages with clear Iterative Drawing engagement are:

- Iterative drawing and pencil tests (ideas for shots, flow, compositions and subject matter)

¹⁰⁷ Endelt, B. "Design Strategy for Optimal Iterative Learning Control Applied on a Deep Drawing Process." *The International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology* 88, no. 1 (2017): 3-18.

¹⁰⁸ Atlas, Charles. "Tabaimo in "Boundaries": Art in the Twenty-First Century, Season 6." In *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, 54m, 2012. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s6/tabaimo-in-boundaries-segment/>.

- Iterative drawing and final pencil keyframes (blocking out animation, layout and scenes)
- Iterative drawing and pencil production (making things move and finding transitions to move through the narrative elegantly)

I believe drawing can be a method of knowing and seeing. There is the same potential within the 2D animation process for this research. With this in mind, the practice was organised as iterative experiments, exploring and responding to these ideas through animation, determining success through ongoing critique and reflection of the work as it developed.

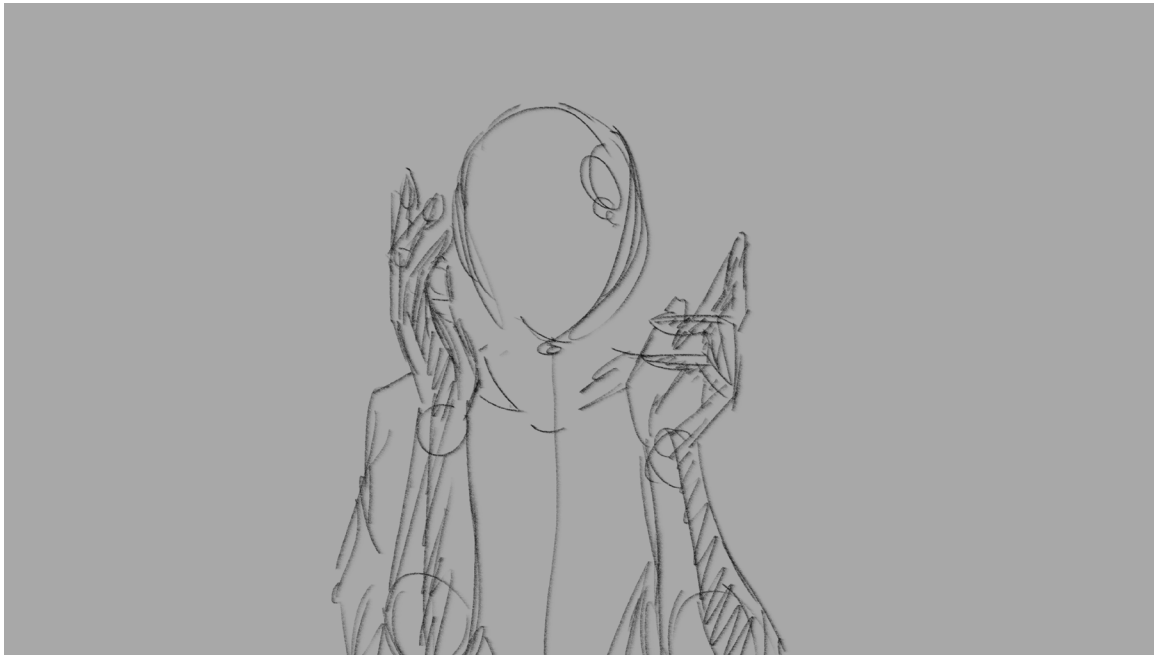


Figure 33. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard Still - End*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Production Pipeline

The development of an animation production pipeline provides for both the practical needs of the creative artefact and helps map the actions required for completion.¹⁰⁹ Renee Dunlop describes the pipeline as the glue that holds together each artist's work involved in production:

In this, a pipeline is much the same as an assembly line, in which each worker performs their task before handing off their completed work to the next. The main difference between creating art and creating factory goods is that the creative process incorporates review cycles through which the final product can be refined—and, if necessary, the pipeline itself is modified.¹¹⁰

The pipeline (Figure 34) proceeded in the order of pre-production, production and post-production before final delivery. Combining pre-conceptualisation and pre-visualisation drew upon approaches, such as iterative drawing, as a productive and creative mode of developing the

¹⁰⁹ Mou, Tsai-Yun. "Creative Story Design Method in Animation Production Pipeline." Paper presented at the DS79: Proceedings of The Third International Conference on Design Creativity, Bangalore, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Dunlop, Renee. *Production Pipeline Fundamentals for Film and Games*. Routledge, 2014.

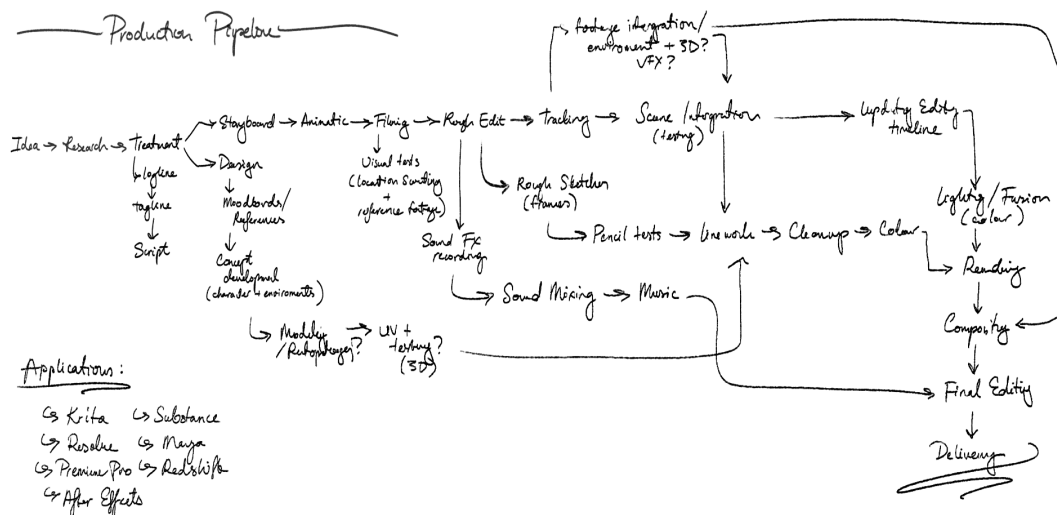
critical sections of the animation. Dramaturgical methods supported the formal collection and organisation of ideas tested through the hand-drawn animation stage of the process (moving forward from pre-production to production).

The production pipeline is also informed by Pixar for the overlap of responsibilities between production areas, functioning as an advanced technological beehive of hardworking bees.¹¹¹ The process allows Pixar to remain an efficient, consistent, and successful studio that allows input from different departments and produces well-loved, heartfelt and highly respected films. The difference here for my pipeline is that I am one bee, the sole crew member responsible for all production areas, whether storyboarding, animating or directing. In response, I take influence from Pixar and artists such as Norman McLaren for mapping the project timeline to see which aspects can operate simultaneously.

Dunlop states that “a pipeline can be defined by the questions it answers” because it anticipates problems before they arise within the making.¹¹² The author lists some questions that arise within the production pipeline of film as follows:

How many shots are there? How many tasks does that break down into, and how many artists are needed to tackle them? Who is working on what? Where is their work being stored?¹¹³

By answering these proposed anticipated questions due to the project’s nature or scope, the process helps determine and identify resource requirements (both virtual and physical). Visualising the pipeline within my project also allowed me to see patterns and a process flowchart to achieve the desired result.



¹¹¹ Catmull, Edwin. *How Pixar fosters collective creativity*. MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, 2008.

¹¹² Dunlop, 3.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Figure 34. Lesley Ung. *Production Pipeline*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

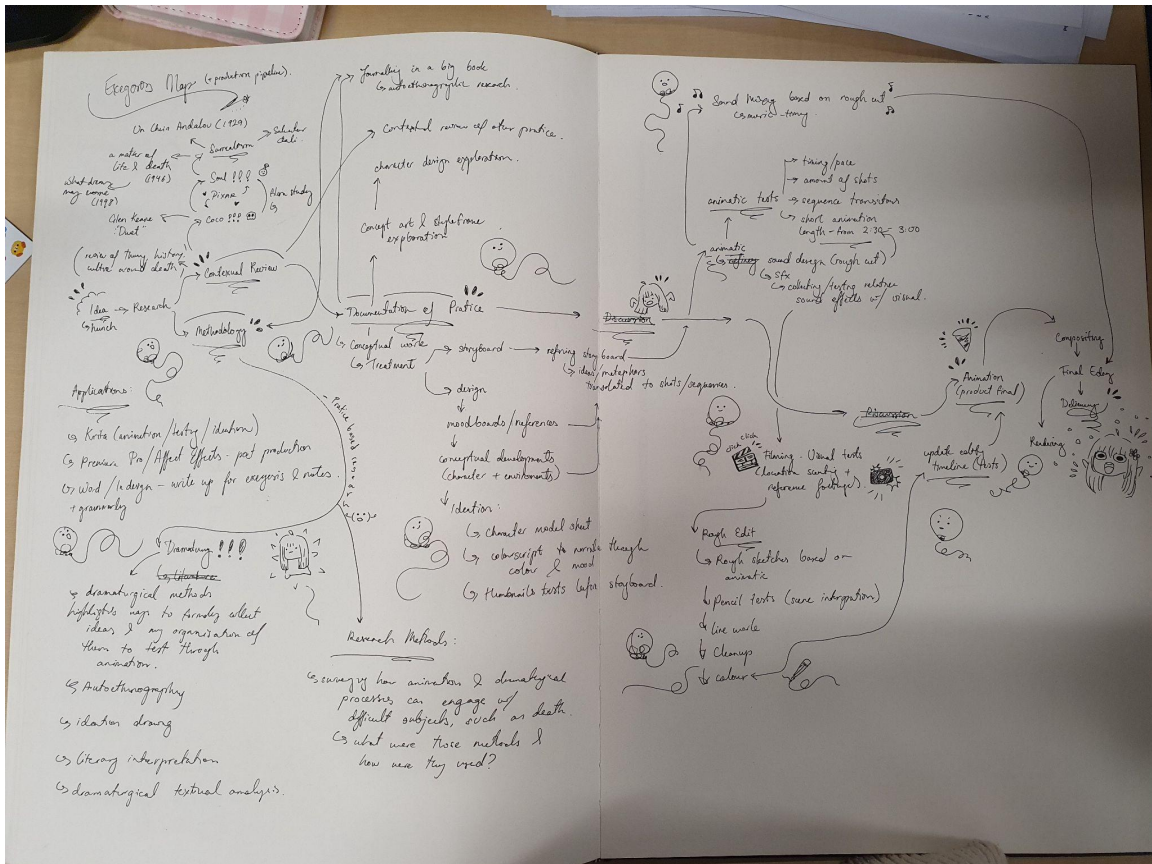


Figure 35. Lesley Ung. *Thesis Map with Production Pipeline weaved within*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

For example, the pipeline worked alongside the iterative process from illustration to iteration, back to illustration to iteration, and then to movement/transitional tests. The process required constant revision (iterations) through drawings to inform the decisions about constraints, aesthetics and transitions.

The Pre-production, Production and Post-production choices (guided by the timeline) progress through the practice-based research process. As an animator, combining pre-conceptualisation and pre-visualisation allows me to draw on approaches, such as ideation or iterative drawing, as a practical way to develop a story. For example, within the production pipeline, I discovered that my project required the iterative process to flow through the animatic (pre-visualisation stage). The traditional way of using an animatic is as pre-visualisation that follows from the storyboard, conveying the storyboard or ideas in motion, often with sound design. For *Dénouement*, the animatic became a way to tease out the story and transitions instead. This radical shift was discovered through the making when I initially followed the traditional pipeline.

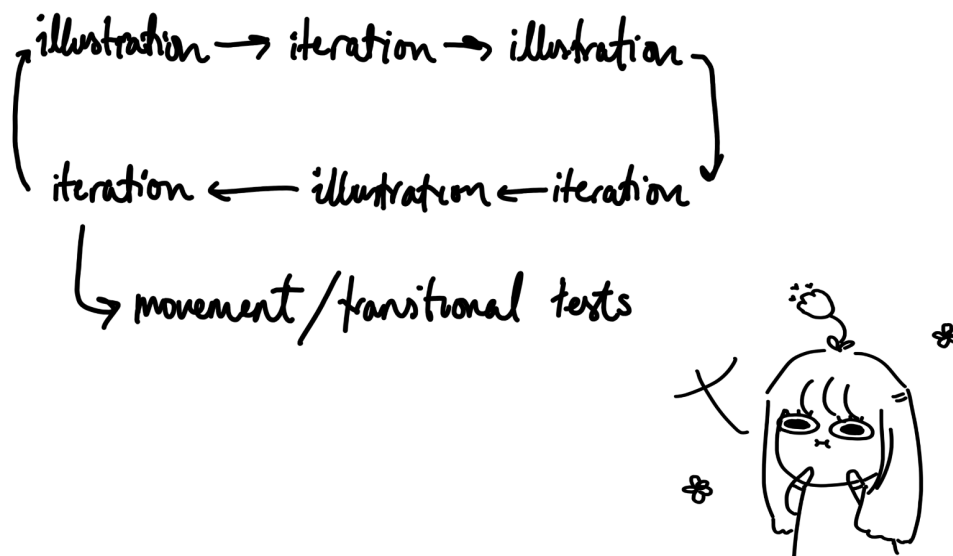


Figure 36. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing alongside the Pre-Production Pipeline*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

As a framework to work on, using technology as an animator (software for technical adjustments or editing) provides another effective way of drawing out meaning that explores the inquiry and overarching aims. An example would be avoiding digital software specifically to clean lines for clean linework. I wanted the rough organic textures and lines drawn to stay within the frames to show how I felt during the making. The line's roughness, fluidity, and density all represent the emotions as I travelled through the making. Therefore, I made the software and pen display recognise a high level of sensitivity for the pen to interact with the screen. The heightened sensitivity offered a more diverse set of lines each time I drew or animated based on my feelings.

In Chapter Four, through the timeline of my production pipeline, I critique and engage with these established practical methods selected for the making.

Creative Constraints

Creative constraints are an imposed method, and the toolkit I built to create aesthetic continuity and a workflow that directs attention to potential hindrances. These constraints uphold restrictions within *Dénouement* to work up against as a guideline. The methodological framework of creative constraints includes the constraints involved with this project due to narrative needs and working as an individual filmmaker/animator.

Seung-hoon Jeong and Jeremi Szaniawski write that “control from an external source, whether individual or institutional, is usually experienced as a constraint” can be on one’s freedom of

expression, action and movement.¹¹⁴ In the context of a creative constraint, the authors discuss that constraints impose limitations that can limit the artist's scope and how it develops:

It is the very notion of the unfettered freedom of the imagination and the claim of being in control which defines the auteur and sustains the authorial myth within the system rather than being an effective defense against the system by resisting its constraints or destabilizing its mechanisms. Whichever way one looks at it, effective counter-strategies or subversion have to come from *within* rather than without, and they do so in the form or *additional constraints*: these, however, must be *freely* chosen rather than submitted to under protest, or adopted by way of compromise.¹¹⁵

Highlighted by the authors, the creative constraint has a notion of limited imagination and almost a loss of control (for the project's direction). However, we can reframe the creative constraint as a way to effectively and freely choose additional supportive constraints. The authors suggest that the purpose of imposing creative constraints allows us to “master a situation, by first making it worse: to aggravate it, turn it against oneself, and to internalise it”, and in doing so, it allows the practitioner to regain a form of agency or control.¹¹⁶ Creative constraints allow a direct and transparent look at addressing issues within a project's early development, offering a space to form compromise or a settlement.

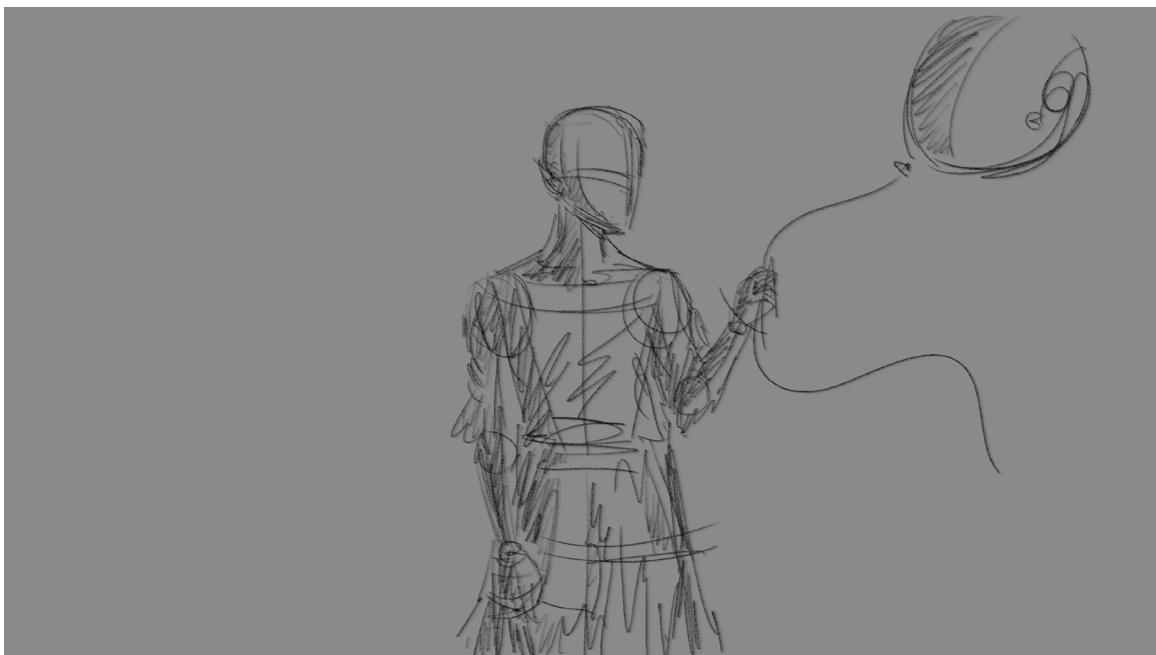


Figure 37. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard frame – Balloon*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Dénouement's creative constraints involve compromise based on the narrative and working as a sole practitioner. It also discusses accommodations as ways to be more productive, innovative and creative.

¹¹⁴ Jeong, Seung-hoon, and Jeremi Szaniawski. *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2017.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

An individual filmmaker and animator working on their own

As the sole crew member producing the short, it was an enormous task to take on pre-production and post-production roles. The creative constraints gave me a clear scope of what is feasible on my own. Chapter Two discusses experimental filmmakers, such as McLaren and Lye, which I responded to for their efficient procedures in filmmaking and meticulous detail in planning. I mapped out my project timeline and estimated timeframes for different parts, alternative ways to proceed, and various sections that can operate simultaneously. An example would be to render pencil tests through Krita (2D animation software) while editing the order for the animation sequence in Adobe Premiere Pro (Video Editing software).

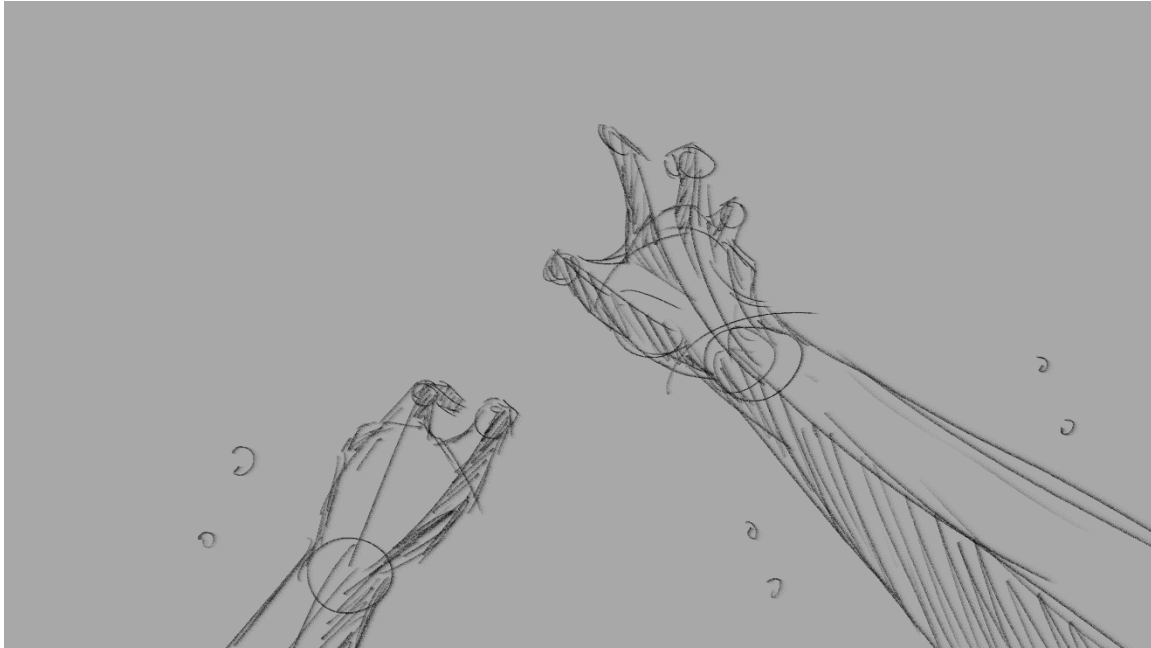


Figure 38. Lesley Ung. *Animatic Still – Drown*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Animating on a digital device, rather than on paper

Traditional forms of hand-drawn animation utilised the tactile making process, creating the motion frame-by-frame on paper or *cel* sheets. With the timeframe I had to complete this project, it was unrealistic to animate on paper. The processing of physical pages of the frames was another time-consuming factor. The efficiency of digitally animating (hand-drawing onto a digital pen display or drawing tablet) means the files would reside within my hard drive. I saved time processing these drawings by saving them as images, ready to be reworked, modified and uploaded. In the future, however, I would love to explore animating directly on paper, or perhaps *cel* animation, though it was not suitable for this project.



Figure 39. Lesley Ung. *Animatic Still – Stare*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Frame rate

The constraint for the project's frame rate remained at six-frames per second (6fps) rather than twenty-four frames (24fps), which is common in feature-length animations.¹¹⁷ The aesthetic choices to achieve the best design outcome (given the individual nature of the practice) led me to refer to Tabaimo's animations and approach as an individual animator. Using a lower frame rate for the animation sequences, Tabaimo focuses on the beauty of exploring each drawing to create the illusion of motion.

During my earlier pencil tests, I envisioned the short to be twelve frames per second (12fps). However, it was unrealistic with my timeframe and the shots I was trying to achieve. Once the new pencil tests supported the exploration of frame rate, I switched gears to work at 6fps. The lower frame rate holds the individual frames longer as if it told me to slow down and gently guide myself through the experience. Rather than having a higher frame rate to create that 'smooth' look, the new frame rate allowed the fluidity of the visuals to guide the transitions. Each hand-drawn frame holds longer, allowing the viewer to indulge in the lines that come to life, created directly from the artist's hand.

Length

Another constraint was the minimum and maximum length of the short film. I intended it to be no longer than five minutes but more than two minutes. Surprisingly, after each negotiation of feelings, new shots and scenes emerged within the making. The amount of footage (without the transitions between shots) exceeded four minutes; therefore, I had the opportunity to select the

¹¹⁷ Depending on the frame's contents (such as layers of light or post-production effects), a single frame can take more than a day to render, assuming no issues or corruption hinder the process.

most compelling shots. Less is more, and I removed animation that felt weak, either lacking consistency within frames or looked strange amongst the rest.

Creative visual constraints

Creative visual constraints introduce symbols or ideas of recurrence. The project moved away from symbols that no longer resonated with contemporary contexts and reframed a few with a subjective lens. As mentioned in Chapter One, we gravitate to Vanitas¹¹⁸ works because of their startling reminder about living as a universal experience. The work transcends time and culture because we can all find meaning (within the work) based on our subjective lens. After early pencil tests focused on facial animation, the character's anatomy becomes the key to moving from presenting the literal into a more symbolic form. This shift changed the way I represented emotion, feelings and sensations through the means of body and motion.

My short film has a prominent use of lines, circles, and the body (character). The animation relies on the metamorphosis of these elements to create the symbology. I moulded these elements based on my feelings, emotions and sensations within the making. Symbols slowly emerged from the iterative process as they underpinned the creative visual constraints for the animated space that the character lives within. For example, the balloon symbolises life (breath within its rubbery encasing like a human life within the body) and losing it as it deflates or floats away. The balloon is a tangible object to chase after as the character grapples with loss. The repetition of the original symbol encouraged discoveries within simple shapes, such as the circle evolving into the balloon, the human head, or bubbles.



Figure 40. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard frame – Think*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

¹¹⁸ Vanitas is a form of 17th-century art that exhibits symbols of mortality, encouraging reflection upon life.

Transitional experiments (testing transitions)

During my animatic tests, the transitional moments within the drawing were a creative constraint that seeped through. The animatic became a way to tease out a new way to present, connect and move between shots. The challenge then shifted to ensuring the transitions between one shot to another were elegant, which is informed by the works of Lye. Instead of making the connection through the editing procedure, the transitions Lye utilised become part of the storytelling to move across the narrative. As I encompassed the idea of fluidity within the film and visual translations of feelings, it was essential to play with transitions during the drawing (animating) process.

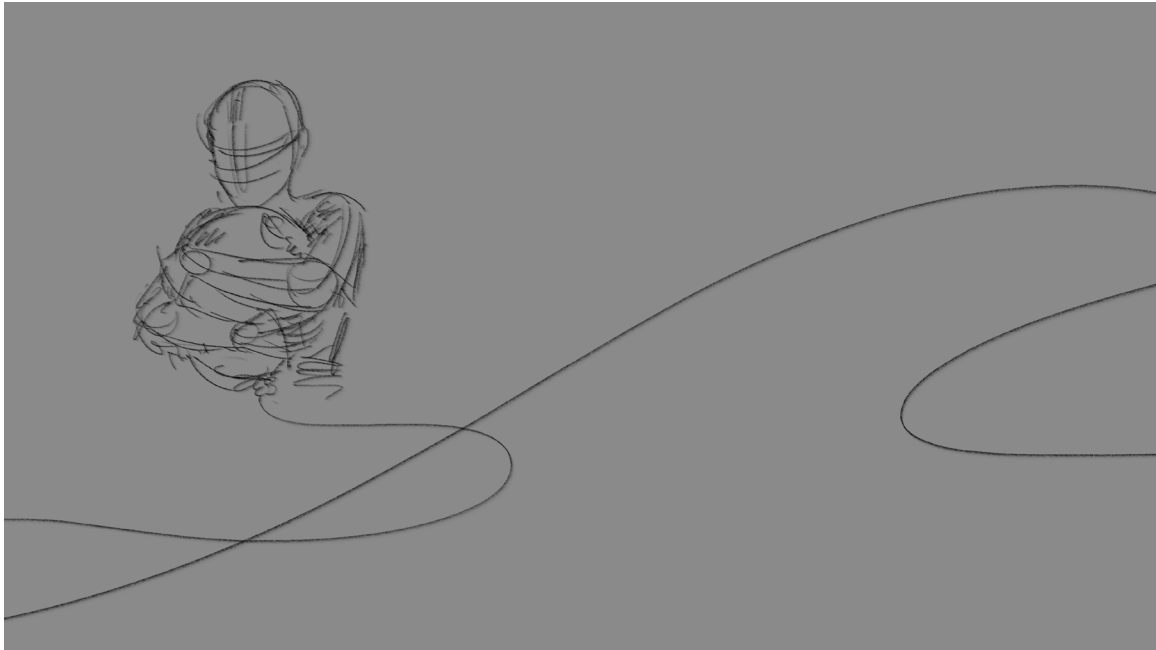


Figure 41. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard frame – Hold*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

The following chapter unpacks the methods in action as the Documentation of Practice. Chapter Four describes the manifested practices and a critique of the methods (that worked or did not work) demonstrated by my iterations.

Chapter Four: Documentation of Practice

Introduction

The research project *Dénouement* navigates communicating a complex emotional topic through an animation practice. The short film aims to develop an emotional connection with the audience through tactile, visual devices articulated through illustration and hand-drawn animation methods.¹¹⁹ The act of animating (drawing frame-by-frame) is a layered iterative process that involves the animator touching the material in the making – metaphorically leaving traces of the artist as fingerprints in the work. This project's position is that there is a potent connection between the artefact and the audience established through this making process. The drawing is mediated through digital technology to finalise the animation (being rendered and processed digitally). However, the process is still at its foundation, an analogue medium (starting with physical illustration in workbooks and storyboards). This way of working has informed a digital production pipeline as a hybrid way of realising the artefact.

Dénouement aims for the animation to transmit (in some way) the subjective feelings experienced by the practitioner as a platform to communicate an understanding of loss and grieving. This communication aim draws on symbolic representations of death as visual connection points for the audience to identify based on their own experiences. Chapter Four discusses the documentation of the practice as it unfolded, using the production pipeline structurally to tell the story and application of research methods in pre-production through to post-production. In addition, understanding affect as it transmits as grief (reviewed Chapter One) was necessary as it impacted decisions involved in the making. Reflecting on other practitioners and their work (who work with complex subjects) has also informed choices during the production of the artefact.

In some ways, the act of the practice became a way to cope with complex inner monologue during confronting discussions, thoughts and feelings. Despite the comfort I feel in making animation, it was not easy to proceed with the project and working on it affected me deeply on an emotional level. As I did not methodologically work with primary interviewees (for example), the key ethical implications for the research were protecting the researcher-practitioner. I understood it was necessary to navigate carefully to avoid any safety concerns. As this aspect of the research is a part of the lived (autoethnographic) experience embedded in the creative processes, my feelings and contemplations, making aesthetic discoveries, navigation and heightened anxieties are part of the discussion in this chapter.

¹¹⁹ For me, something unique or haptically connecting emerges from the processes of producing the analogue material for the film.

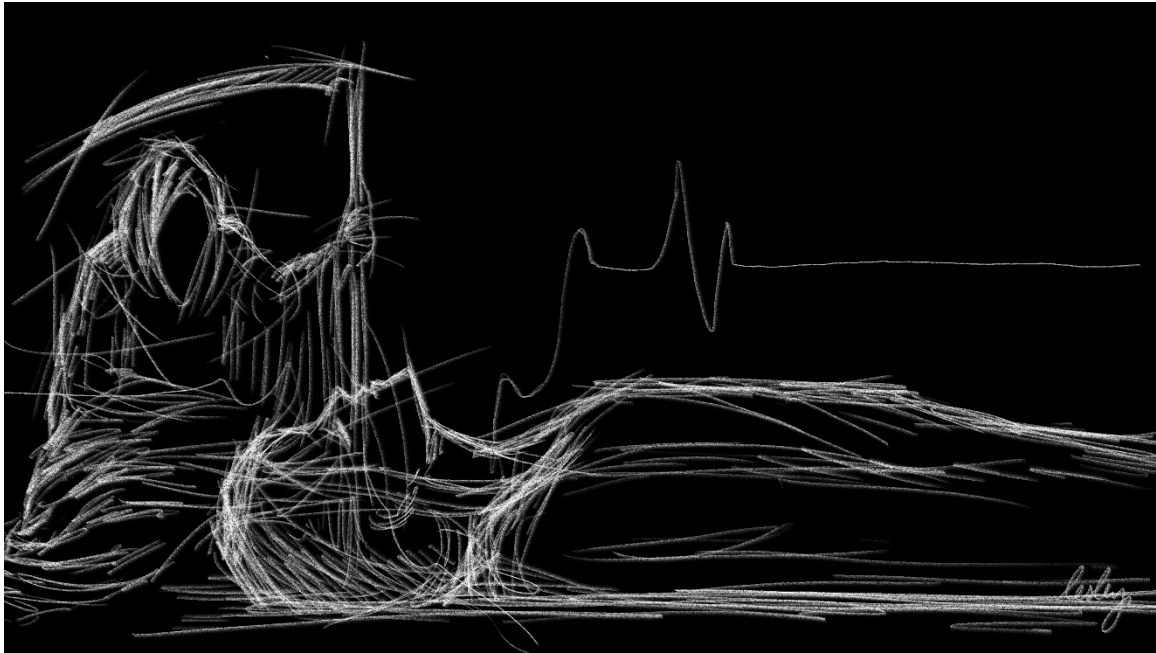


Figure 42. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 1: What is Death?*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

Ideation Drawing - What is Death to me?

As mentioned in Chapter One, it was an overwhelming experience to immerse in the theoretical contemplations about death and delve into the accompanying feelings of loss. Through autoethnographic contemplations, I yearned for a more human, emotional and emphatic way to connect with the topic. In my practice, I aimed to create a place of connection because (from my own tacit experience) people relate to animated characters if the characters feel real. As discussed in Chapter Two of Pixar's storytelling, this feeling of realism falls back on the storyteller to write about what we know, as it makes us feel a particular way. We aim to communicate the experience effectively, and, one way or the other, it may connect and resonate with the viewer.

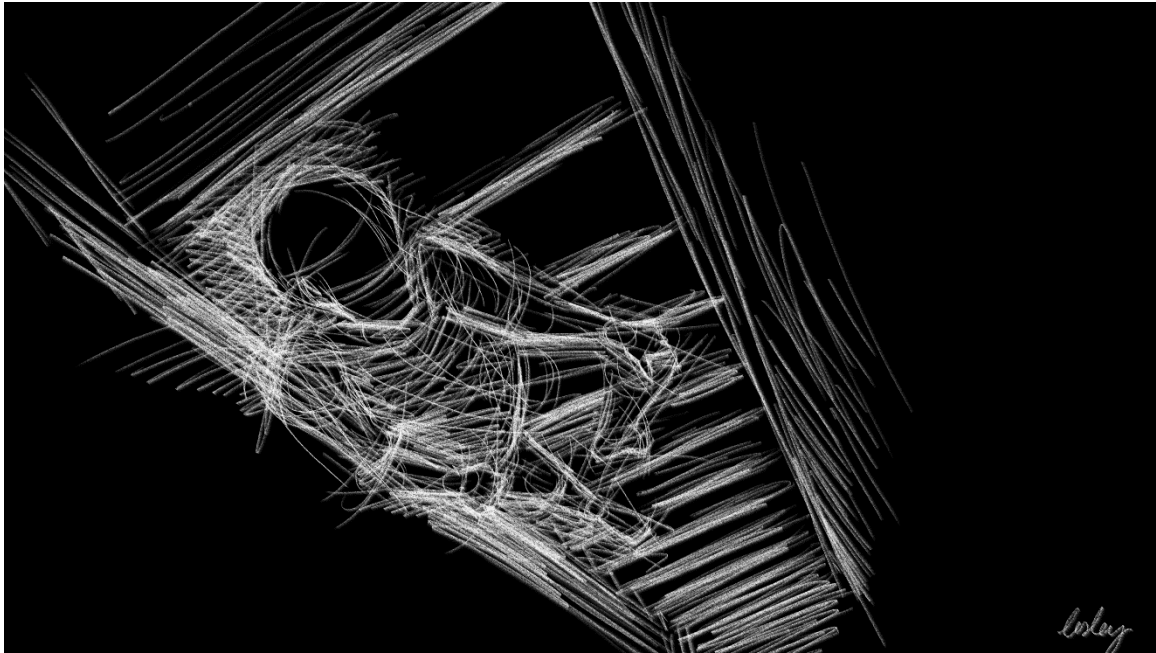


Figure 43. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 2: Rest*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

Early conceptions of the project started with ideation around the “What is death vs What is death to me?”, and that conversation came about during a discussion with Professor Welby Ings.¹²⁰ In our lighthearted talk, Professor Ings challenged my views, attitude, and perceptions around death, loss and grief and how my views result from upbringing, culture, media, and experiences. First, I describe death through the five senses — touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing.¹²¹ For me, touch equated to the delicate graze of the skin that once embodied a person, a soul. The smell was connected to flowers, mourning and representing the funeral preparations of those we have lost and visits to the graveyard. The taste was the lack of it — the lack of appetite or enjoyment of flavours presented in comforting food. The sight was seeing the emotions of those affected during loss, which was often melancholic, painful and heartbreaking. For hearing, an Erhu, a traditional Chinese instrument¹²² personally sounds like a person's tender wailing cries.

From the five senses, I realised that death went beyond what I previously mentioned: death is an awakening to living. Death's deadline, for many, is the motivation to experience the world as it is and use time wisely. Then I thought about the prompt “When you are watching someone else die, what do the last 30 seconds of life look like?” and I did not have an answer. I could not describe what I saw — instead, I was able to describe how I felt.

¹²⁰ Professor Welby Ings is an award winning designer, filmmaker and playwright. His passion for moving image, animation and radical exploration offered an insightful yet friendly discussion about where to start while looking at storytelling and death.

¹²¹ My answers surprised me as I never saw death through this particular lens—death had to do with leaving the world, death was a loss, and death was pain.

¹²² Stock, Jonathan. "A historical account of the Chinese two-stringed fiddle erhu." *The Galpin Society Journal* (1993): 83-113.



Figure 44. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 3: Time*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

Early Pencil Tests - Facial emotions

The next step was to look at pencil tests of these complex feelings of death, loss, and grief because I wanted to translate the emotions into moving frames and see how they worked. I discovered that pencil tests became a recurring tool from the drawing methods (ideation and iterative drawing, which leads to animating). Going from drawing static illustrations to testing motion within frames felt right because I am an animator.

There are threads of contextual reflection in this chapter, such as referring back to *The Five Stages of Grief*. I looked at two of the stages, Anger and Depression, out of curiosity. Then from those two tests, I moved into taking a more surrealist approach and symbolically tried to capture the essence of the emotion of fear (presented in the test, “Trapped”).

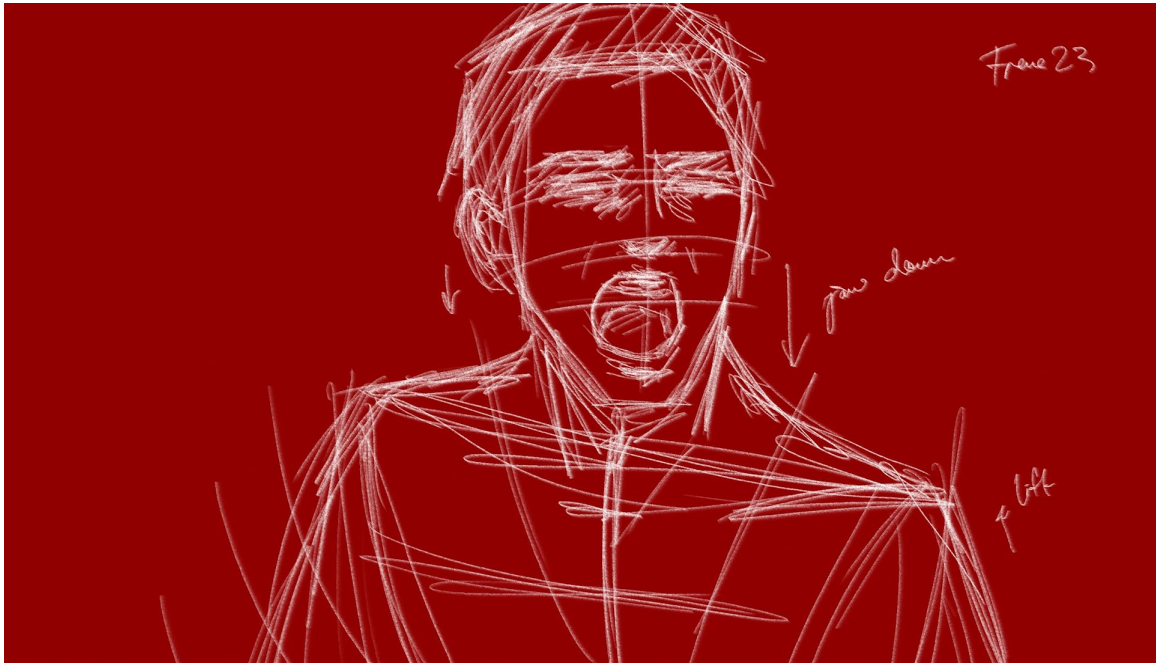


Figure 45. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test Frame - Anger*, 2020, digital animation, Auckland

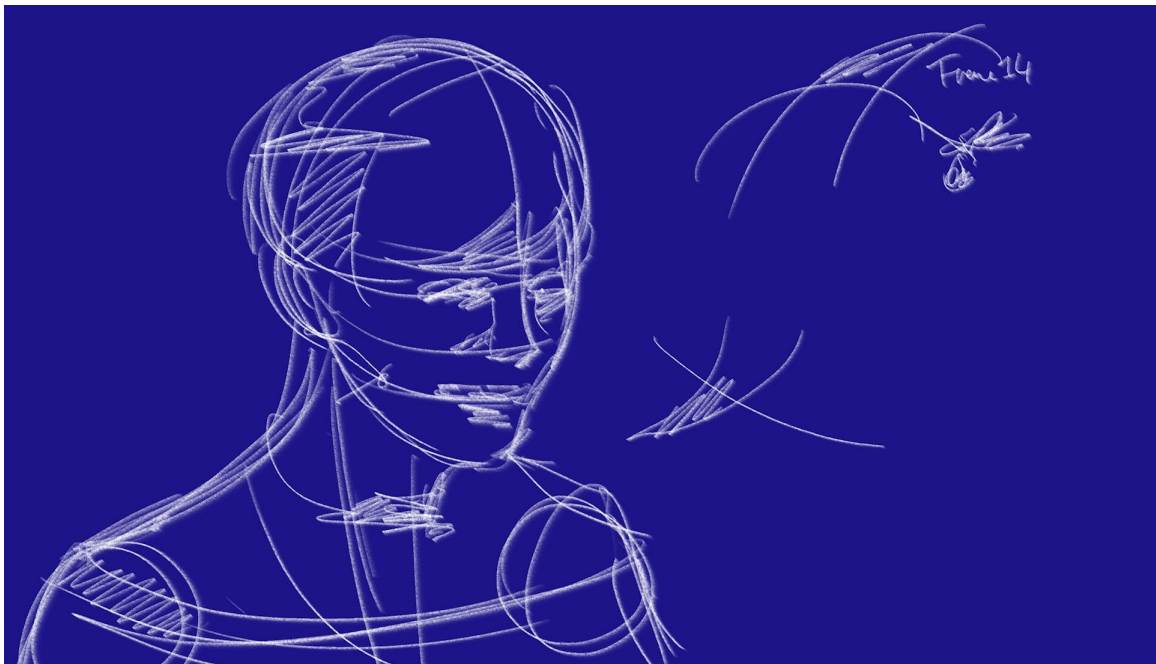


Figure 46. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test Frame - Depression*, 2020, digital animation, Auckland



Figure 47. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test Frame - Trapped (Fear)*, 2020, digital animation, Auckland



Figure 48. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test Frame - What does death look like to me?*, 2020, digital animation, Auckland

Then I looked back at the aesthetic of lines drawn on a black background. Something was so compelling about the visual look when I tested it through ideation drawings I had seen earlier. Traditionally I would draw with black lines on a white page, and inverting this, made me more aware of the sketchiness in my drawing style. “What does death look like to me?” prompts the next test, following similar sentiments to “What is death to me?” tested previously through illustrations in ideation.

The tests revealed that I relied heavily on drawing facial emotions. I only drew what the emotion looked like rather than the experience I was living or navigating at the time (as it happened).¹²³

The Fetch



Figure 49. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 4: Sketch of the Fetch*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

Following the previous discussion with Ings, the Irish folklore of the *fetch* came up, which is similar to a doppelgänger but a supernatural double of a dead person (or a person nearing death).¹²⁴ In other words, the *fetch* could be a double of myself that draws a person (my living self) out of life. It was such a fascinating concept that prompted an ideation session where I drew what that might look like, using myself as the subject. While drawing, I asked the following questions:

- What if there were two versions of myself? One watches the other die – what does that look or feel like?
- If the conscious version of myself is watching the unconscious version, as life leaves my biological body – what do I see or feel?

¹²³ The pencil tests are evidence of the performance or act of the performer (myself) in the animation process because I drew my exploration, understanding and reflections around death, loss, and grief.

¹²⁴ Power, Albert. "Towards an Irish Gothic." *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, no. 1 (2013): 3-32.



Figure 50. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 5: The Fetch*, 2020, digital painting, Auckland

The fetch could have led to many possibilities. However, I decided to move away from it because I wanted to develop a personal story based on an experience. My version of the fetch (Figure 50) is a more photorealistic stylisation in digital painting. Due to this, it played into the eerie look of seeing a double.¹²⁵ The linework drawing (Figure 49) interested me more aesthetically, so I leaned in that direction.

Lines and Aesthetic

As an animator, I knew that linework had the potential to drive the project in the iterative process and with the use of hand-drawn animation, specifically. The fragility and emotion from less refined lines or sketches allowed the artist's fingerprints to emerge. The line itself refers to the making process, a lifeline (concerning death), and the lineage or connection with family (ties into the fear of losing loved ones). Lines became a significant symbol within *Dénouement* because lines falling away connected to the physical and non-physical (material and the spiritual). It allows a conversation between the environment and corporeal bodily responses, creating slippages between what we see, and reinforcing the complexity of death.

¹²⁵ I believe the discomfort of this photorealistic aesthetic was because the fetch closely resembled myself, so I would be focusing on drawing features I have. Everybody is familiar with their features because that is the body and person we spend the most time with (ourselves). Self-conscious and aware of my insecurities, the idea of creating a whole animation with my realistic features did not interest me.

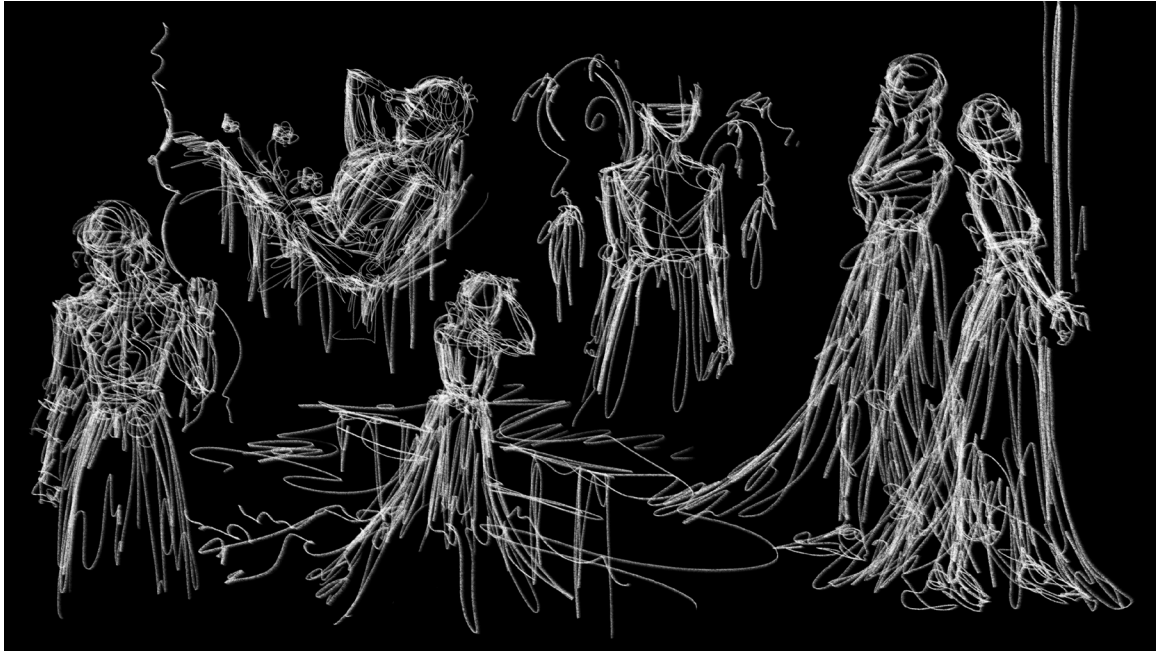


Figure 51. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 6: Death, Lines and Symbols*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

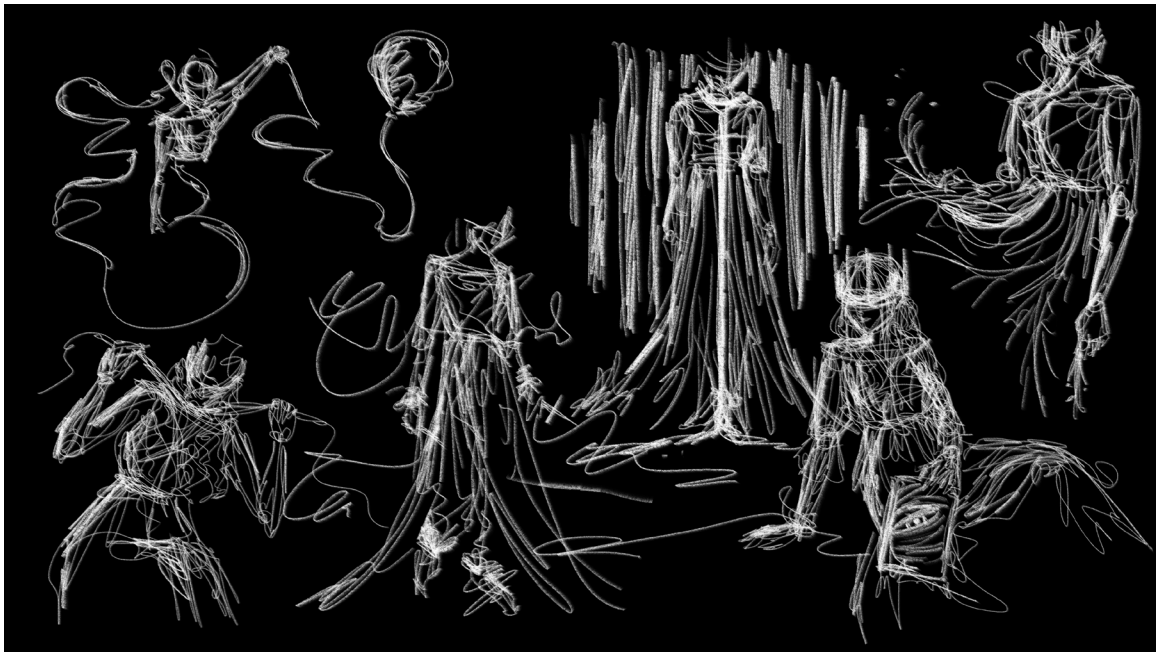


Figure 52. Lesley Ung. *Ideation 7: Death, Lines and Symbols v2*, 2020, digital drawing, Auckland

The ideation drawing allowed me to experiment with unfinished, sketchy or looser lines that heavily influenced the aesthetic choices. Unfinished anatomy speaks about the loss of the body but also the transformation and transaction between living and dying. Common symbols, such as the balloon, decaying flowers and the noose, are tested to see if I have an immediate response to the drawings or if they look cliché. Over time, I allowed the drawings to become less constrained

by anatomical correctness and clean line work.¹²⁶ I was encouraged to further engage with abstraction and take pointers from surrealist, imaginative and dreamlike aspects (mentioned in Chapter Two), which come to the forefront of my subsequent iterations.

Concerns, Reflection and Documentation

Alongside these drawings, the lack of distraction from the topic of death started pulling some concerns. The unsettling feelings I had during this time can help confront this topic as an animator, but also it was immensely draining. The subject matter tossed me into a deep emotional space where death, fear of losing loved ones, and life's fragility came forward. It heightened in the face of COVID-19 during mass isolation and increased health awareness.¹²⁷ My parents are a part of the vulnerable population, which unravelled my fears into something ruthlessly loud — to face a world without them. These intrusive thoughts hung over my head, making me think about farewells throughout life and funerals I have and will eventually attend.

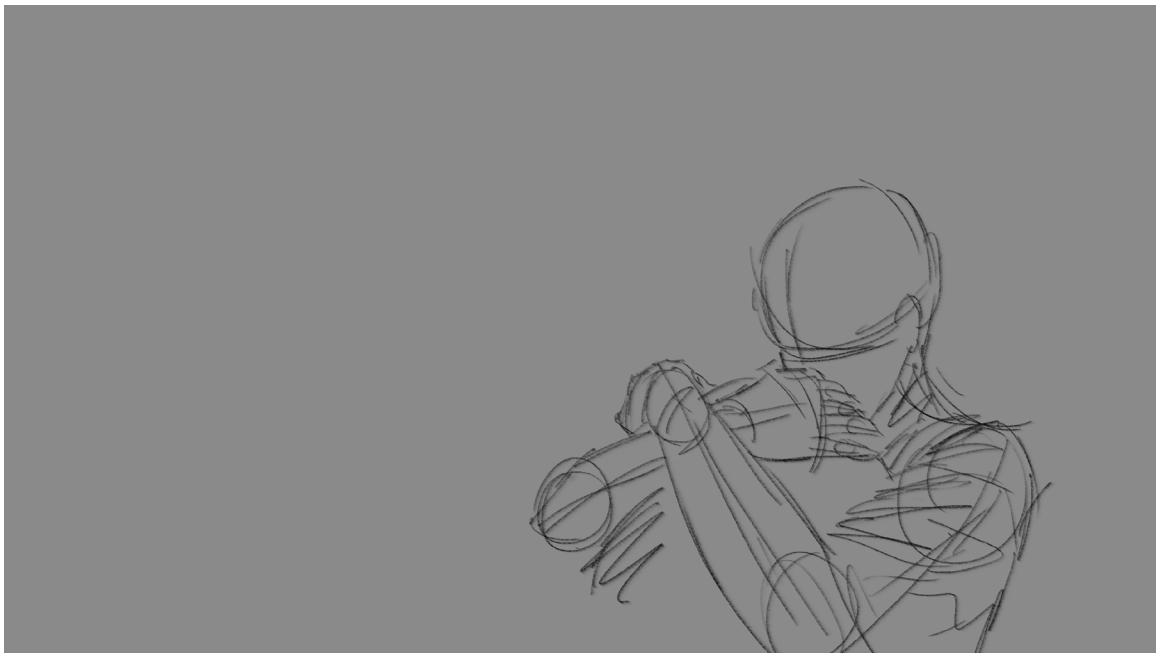


Figure 53. Lesley Ung. *Storyboard frame – Hold v2*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Eventually, these thoughts revealed themselves in tormenting nightmares. I had countless nights contemplating what life might look like without a loved one, ways to save or protect them and, somewhat, mentally preparing for things out of my control. My nightmares vividly fabricated a world to support my rising fear, somehow making unreal things have a sense of realism. It painted these illusions into something that felt tangible as if it were a lived experience. They were not productive either – draining me physically, emotionally, and mentally. Soon after, I could not articulate or compartmentalise my ambivalent feelings about death. However, these observations

¹²⁶ I aimed to break the anatomy's form further, utilise negative space, simplify the sketches (a mix of chaotic and simple sections, similar to life's ups and downs) and test the symbols that resonated with me to create my own.

¹²⁷ I believe this led many others and myself to grapple with these complex feelings in a way we never had.

ignited a curiosity to explore my own anxieties and this personal discomfort around death, using a medium that comforts me.

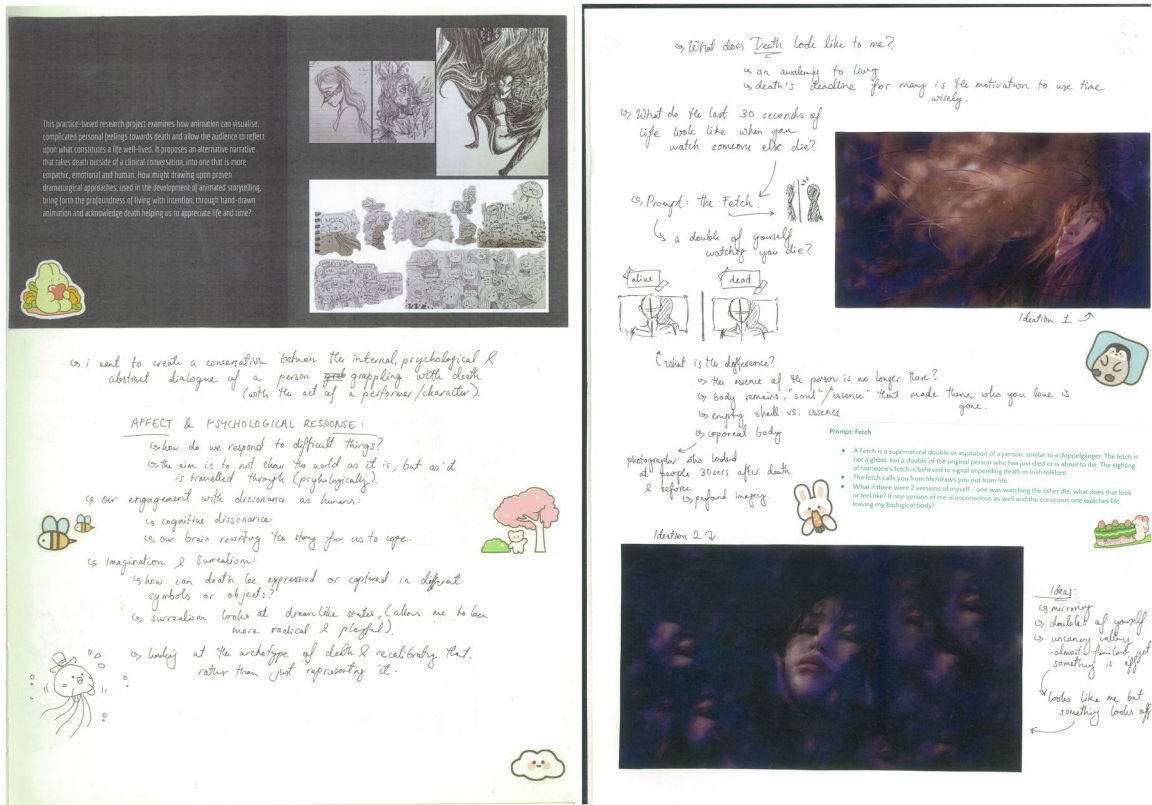


Figure 54. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation - Notes*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

Regarding the Kübler-Ross model (referred to in Chapter One), it was evident that I did not follow or go through the *Five Stages of Grief* linearly. These stages are examples of how people might cope with loss but not how to cope with loss. *Dénouement* follows a similar sentiment where the film does not tell the audience, “this is how to grieve”. Instead, it was for me to grapple with feelings and allow the audience to interpret their own feelings by watching the animation and stringing together their own story through that experience. Thus, my exploration consists of the production pipeline, engagement with the 2D animation process and how drawing each frame shapes my understanding of death, loss and grief.

As discussed in Chapter One, I drew inspiration from the works of Goya, Mosse and Tabaimo due to their strategic execution of complex but often harrowing subjects. In this pre-production stage, I was finding the project’s rhythm – testing different things, making decisions about aesthetics, and conceptualising the character and potential compositions. I printed out physical copies of my drawings, storyboards, animation tests, and notes to gather the digital explorations as malleable pieces to document my findings. I also carried around a physical A3 workbook to document ideas and gather these digital explorations within the tactile journal. The journaling led to a bulletin board to shuffle visual explorations and highlight the aims, research questions, and discoveries. Melding the physicality of drawing, editing and journaling directly on paper captured the autoethnographic process. The workbook and bulletin board both rely on the physicality of having

something to hold, prompting printouts of explorations and directly editing the project to see a clearer overview.

Iterative Drawing – Symbols, Aesthetic and Abstractification

Symbols allow an audience to bring in their own thoughts and have an immediate response to the animation. The new revised questions are:

- How could death be expressed or captured in different symbols or objects?
- Look at the archetype of death and rather than represent it, how will you recalibrate that?

Artists, designers and animators are at the forefront of bringing new symbols to the public imagination. Due to its explorative, iterative nature, animation can be part of that more extensive conversation about how we represent death and which symbols are relevant now. As a result, I explored symbols which resonated subjectively rather than what society pushes as symbols of death. It was important to document the choices in moments of discovery, starting with common clichés and making it more than that. For example, I have explored the deterioration of the human form (deconstruction/disintegration). That, however, encouraged a shift from the clinical by breaking anatomy further, removing any sense of a “complete” self or body. Using the anatomy’s decay prompted thoughts about how to visualise the body’s disintegration or deflation (like a balloon). This deconstruction of the human form is presented in *Un Chien Andalou*¹²⁸, which has ideas behind the film but not necessarily a set linear storyline, with shots that range from deep to possibly meaningless.

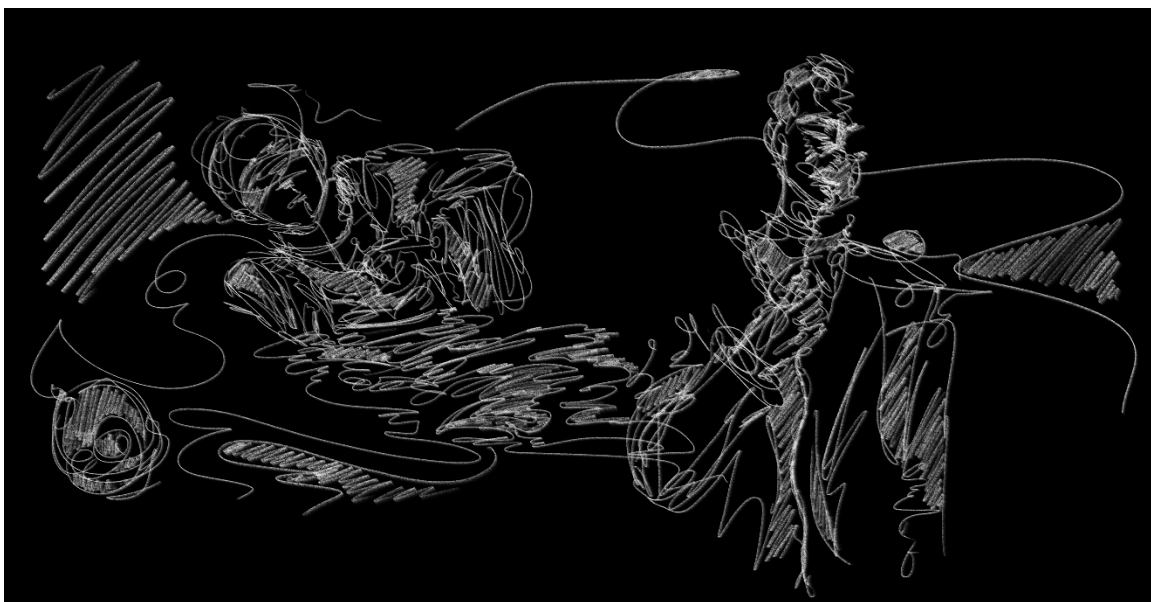


Figure 55. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Breathe*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

The pencil tests I created have human response mechanisms, which help build a dynamic library for findings and support the iterative process of reworking these ideas. Focusing on body language

¹²⁸ Mentioned in Chapter two as a short film that informed my thinking about surrealism, dreamlike states, and the use of bizarre, provocative imagery (often graphic).

to convey emotions (rather than facials) called on how humans leave traces behind to be remembered; therefore, it is not essential to see faces. Instead, it is more powerful to see the collective trace of the being, which is a different way of thinking about the affect and emotions we experience living in the world.



Figure 56. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Flowers and I*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

The demonstration of passion, skill and technique for drawing is also part of the project. As I move into more loose and sketchy drawings, there is an idea to create texture within the frame. A focus became the pressure for drawing (having a lighter or heavier hand), looking at the density of the lines, removing sections or limiting the number of lines. This next phase allowed me to draw confidently, as I was hesitant to use such sketchy or arguably unfinished drawings for an animated film.¹²⁹ A historical example of disrupting the need to draw “perfectly” or “cleanly” is Pablo Ruiz Picasso¹³⁰ because his earlier pieces proved that he could represent or draw anything (in terms of a realist mode of working).¹³¹ The strength of Picasso’s artwork comes in as he unapologetically disrupts the rules of standard representation. Picasso’s later artwork becomes more potent as he does not shy away from conveying fragility. The fragility is understanding the skill (in my case, drawing) and knowing the techniques to perfect it but having the confidence to disperse it. The challenge was to not fall into the aesthetic choices and traditional animation production pipeline that goes through a cleanup process.¹³²

Currently, the main two symbolic gestures I wanted to establish included the line and the symbol of a balloon. There is a sense that lines vibrate within the drawings because they are untamed or

¹²⁹ I have always been more drawn to scribbly, sketchy or unfinished work because it is more interesting to look at — there is a sense of organic authenticity to seeing errors or drawings that are still developing.

¹³⁰ Picasso is a prominent figure in 20th-century art because of his distinct style, drive and perseverance.

¹³¹ Koenderink, Jan, Andrea van Doorn, and Johan Wagemans. "Picasso in the mind’s eye of the beholder: Three-dimensional filling-in of ambiguous line drawings." *Cognition* 125, no. 3 (2012): 394-412.

¹³² The process removes the sketches, leaving clean line art.

sketchy, making them alluring. As a symbolic gesture, the lines do a range of things interpreted differently. They are composed but have the freedom to detach from the character, whether it be to tug on them, string them along or pull them away. The line also presents the malleability, the movement, ups and downs, looping, and curls (alluding to life's ups and downs).



Figure 57. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Puzzle*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Balloons are a common cliché in film, so I asked, “how do I creatively utilise a balloon with my own needs and meaning assigned to it?”. In this context, the balloon contains breath to inflate it (life). Balloons are also present for celebratory occasions, such as birthdays and funerals. The balloon within the project has two separate components joining together to create the symbol: the string (line) and the balloon itself (circle/teardrop-shaped). Another factor to the balloon's importance was because it represents an entity — a delicate life that one day will deflate or float away, alluding to the fragility of life. I wanted the balloon to encompass something the character needs to chase, as if it were their lost loved one, without drawing another reoccurring person or a ghost.¹³³

¹³³ It highlights the idea that we cannot go with those we have lost, but we know we will go as far as possible to be with them. It becomes a symbol the character keeps wanting to find and hold. I also thought about balloons representing the human form at its most fragile and floating around being a breath of air encased within the rubbery plastic (skin).



Figure 58. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Hold*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 59. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Balloon, Tulips and Eyes*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

By revisiting the successes of other artists, I was able to make tacit connections between what I consumed and what I already had experiences or understandings about.¹³⁴ An example would be seeing the moth in *Un Chien Andalou* again and thinking about symbolic gestures within the work based on my understanding of the world. I heard about the recurrence of moths (or butterflies) representing past loved ones returning or visiting in my upbringing. The moth has a symbolic

¹³⁴ Tacit knowledge is gained through living experience and is often subjective or informal.

gesture for my drawings based on my own tacit knowledge, and it may not have the same meaning for another person. In my iterations, I test the use of this symbol alongside other symbols, such as the balloon, flowers, the eye, puzzle pieces and the human form.



Figure 60. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Puzzle and Body*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 61. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Body*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

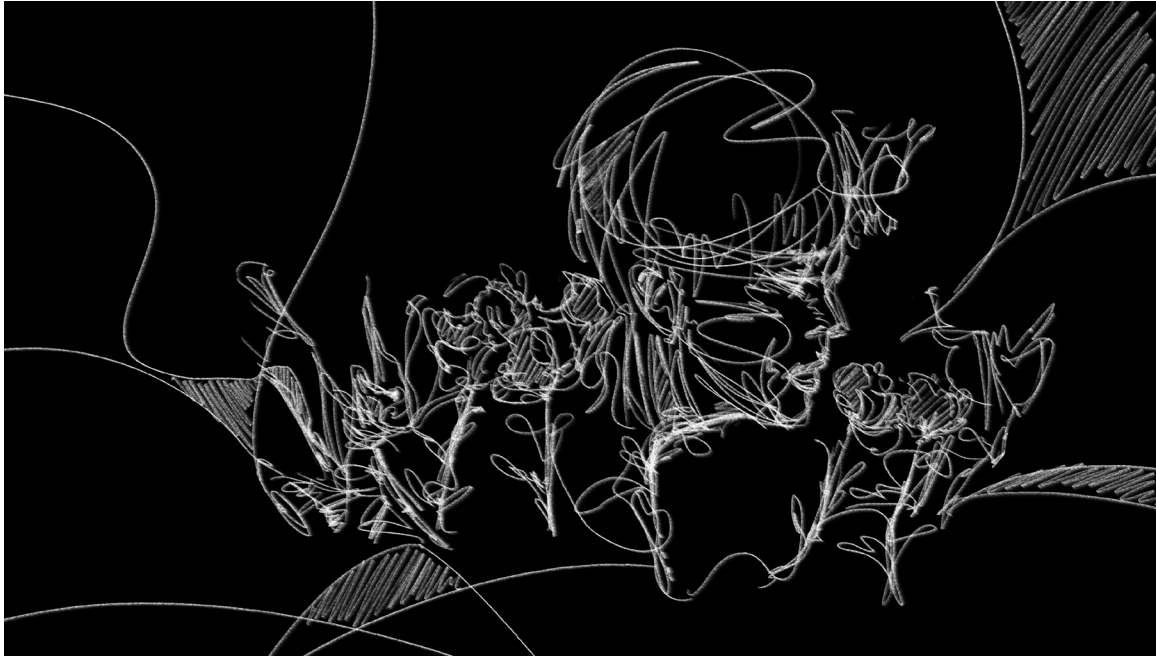


Figure 62. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Garden*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

With the new iterations, I moved into making some of the illustrations move. Amongst this group of pencil tests are also new ones, and this allowed me to look at:

- How might I play with the aesthetics further?
- How to approach the animation aspect by testing the frame rate or parts I animate?
- Along with the previous pencil tests, how different do they look?



Figure 63. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Gaps*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 64. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test – Water*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 65. Lesley Ung. *Pencil Test – Hand*, 2020, digital illustration, Auckland

Storyboard and Animatic Tests - Make and Discover

Finding the story as it was being made

As discussed in Chapter One, affect within my project concerns my grieving process in response to loss. From the researcher's position, the project has provided a new way for me to see and feel. The shift in thinking because of affective experiences has helped direct the choices in this

chapter. Referring back to Massumi’s discussion (Chapter Three), to experience the world at its fullest potential, we need to feel - what we feel will reroute our senses to think differently. The Making, Thinking and Feeling process allows the project to respond to the collective affective experience (of losing a loved one) and the affective components transmitted through translated feelings of the experience. The presence of affect allowed me to negotiate subjective feelings as a practitioner alongside the practice. Ideation, iterative drawing, and the animatic mapped out the animation, rather than a script or treatment, which is the traditional production pipeline for an animated film. Instead of following the industry model or traditional production pipeline, the animation unfolded as I created the project (See Appendix 1).

Through the making, I was discovering. With the documentation, it is evident that I went through constant iterations to rework ideas and find my “aha” moments.

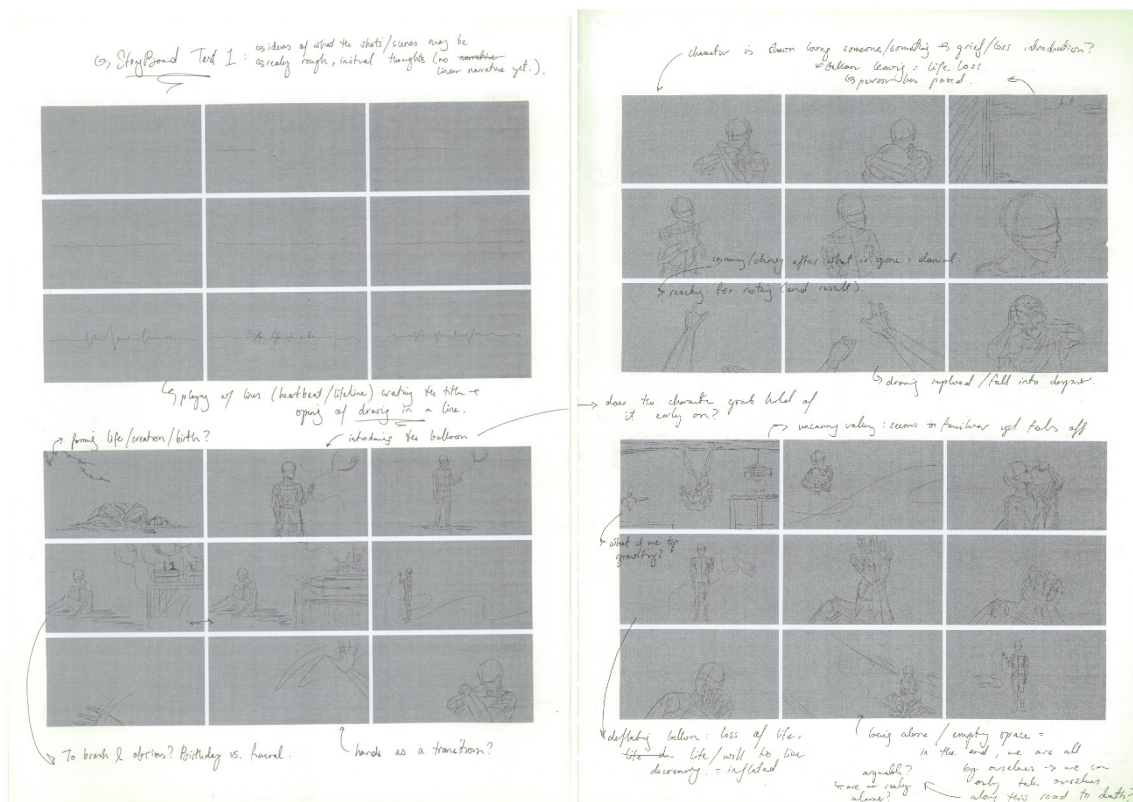


Figure 66. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Storyboard 1*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

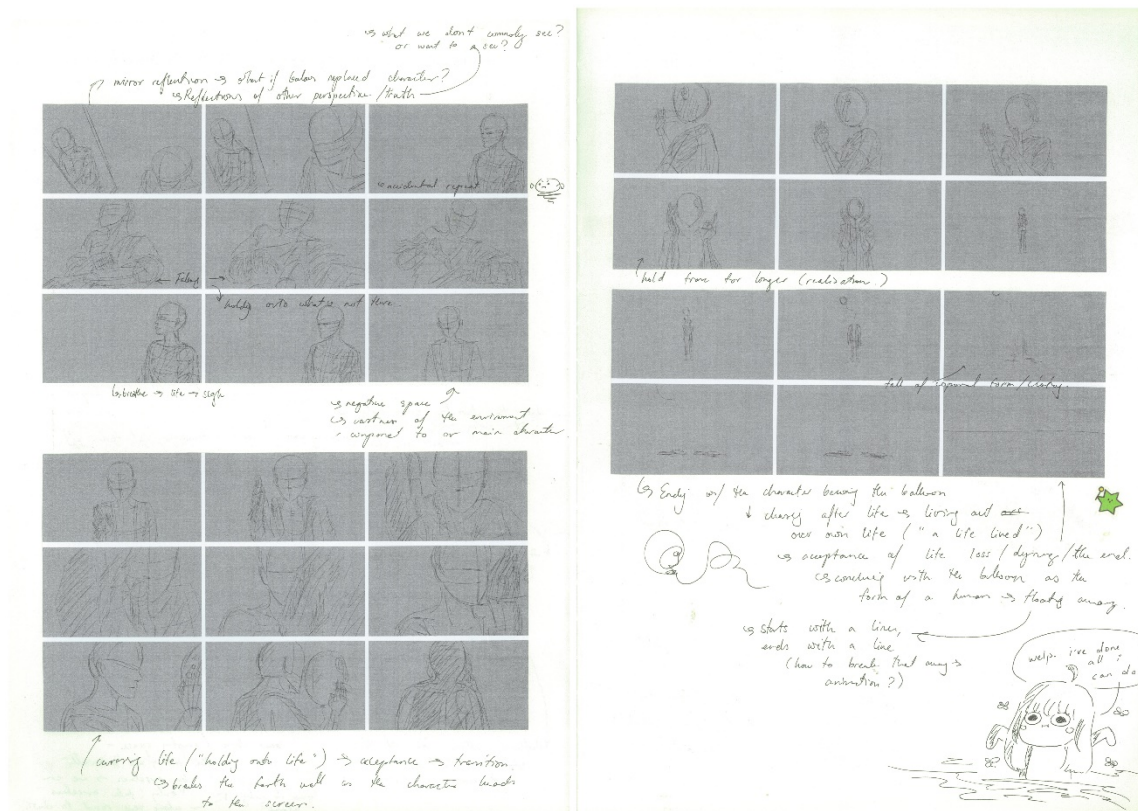


Figure 67. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Storyboard 1*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

Greg M. Smith's *Film structure and the emotion system* was an exciting read when looking at storyboarding a film with no treatment, script, or barely any written work (to explain the story structure). I only had ideas translated through ideation and iterative illustrations at the time. Through the creation of a mood, Smith states a film will elicit emotion, and in an emotional sense, the film asks the viewer to interpret the surroundings of the character.¹³⁵ Focusing on this during the storyboarding process, I increased the chance of the predisposition so the audience feels something from the animation. Through association, I can use a range of stimuli and perceptual cues in the visuals to evoke feelings. For example, for most of the shots, I placed the character within a vast, empty black background that is a stripped-down environment, with no other elements besides the character. The use of negative space sets the mood because it leaves a hollow, empty feeling around the character.

¹³⁵ Smith, Greg M. *Film Structure and the Emotion System*: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

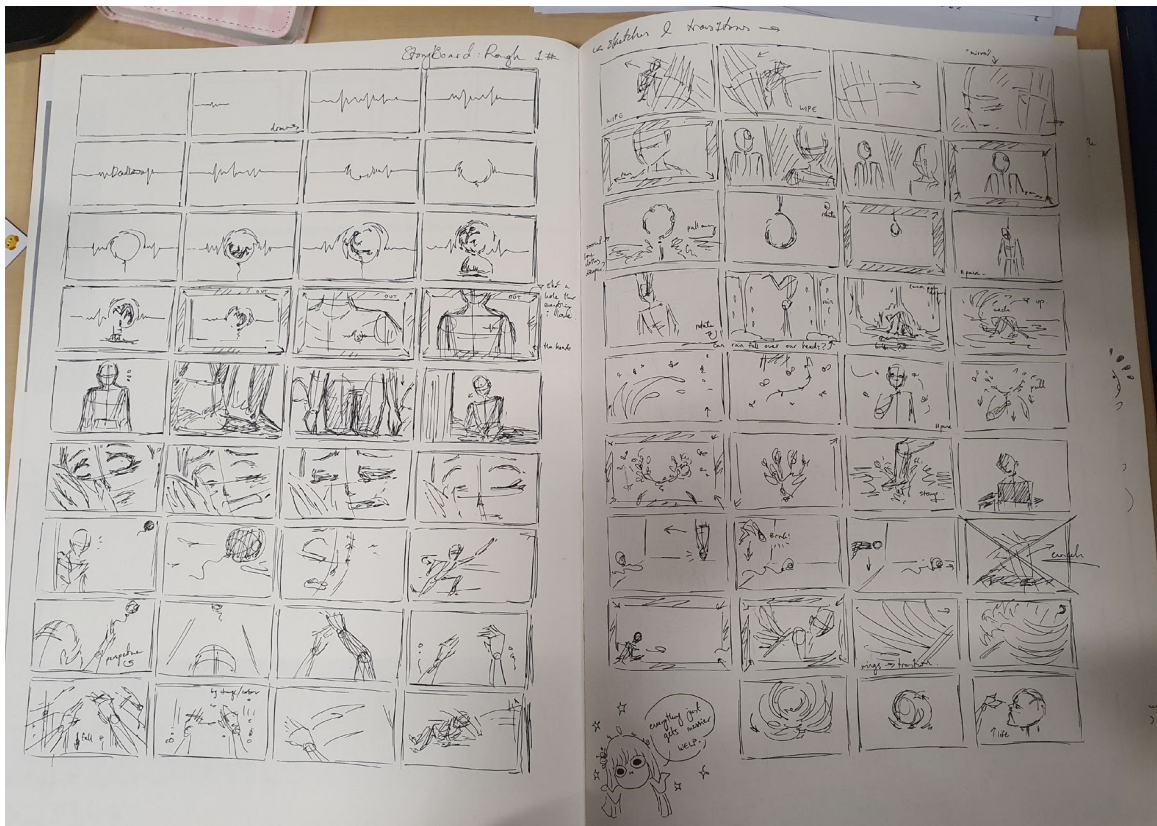


Figure 68. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Storyboard Draft 1*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

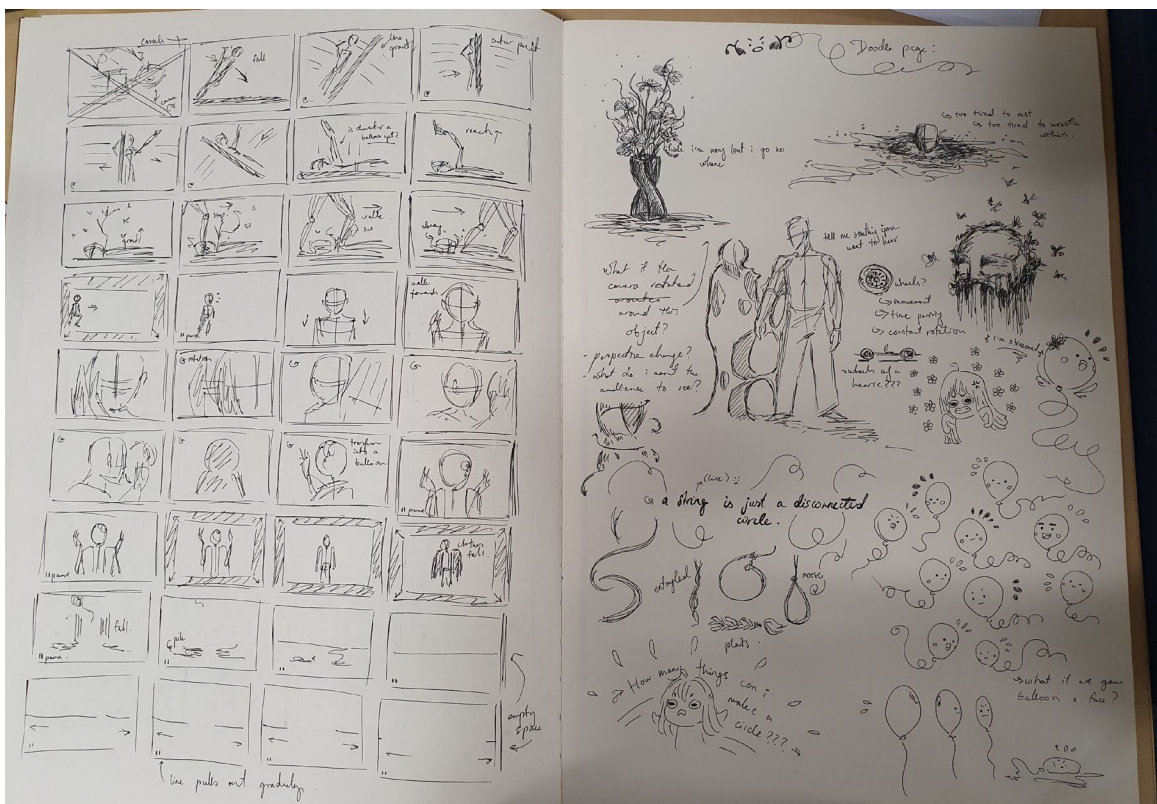


Figure 69. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Storyboard Draft 1*, 2020, photograph, Auckland

The Character

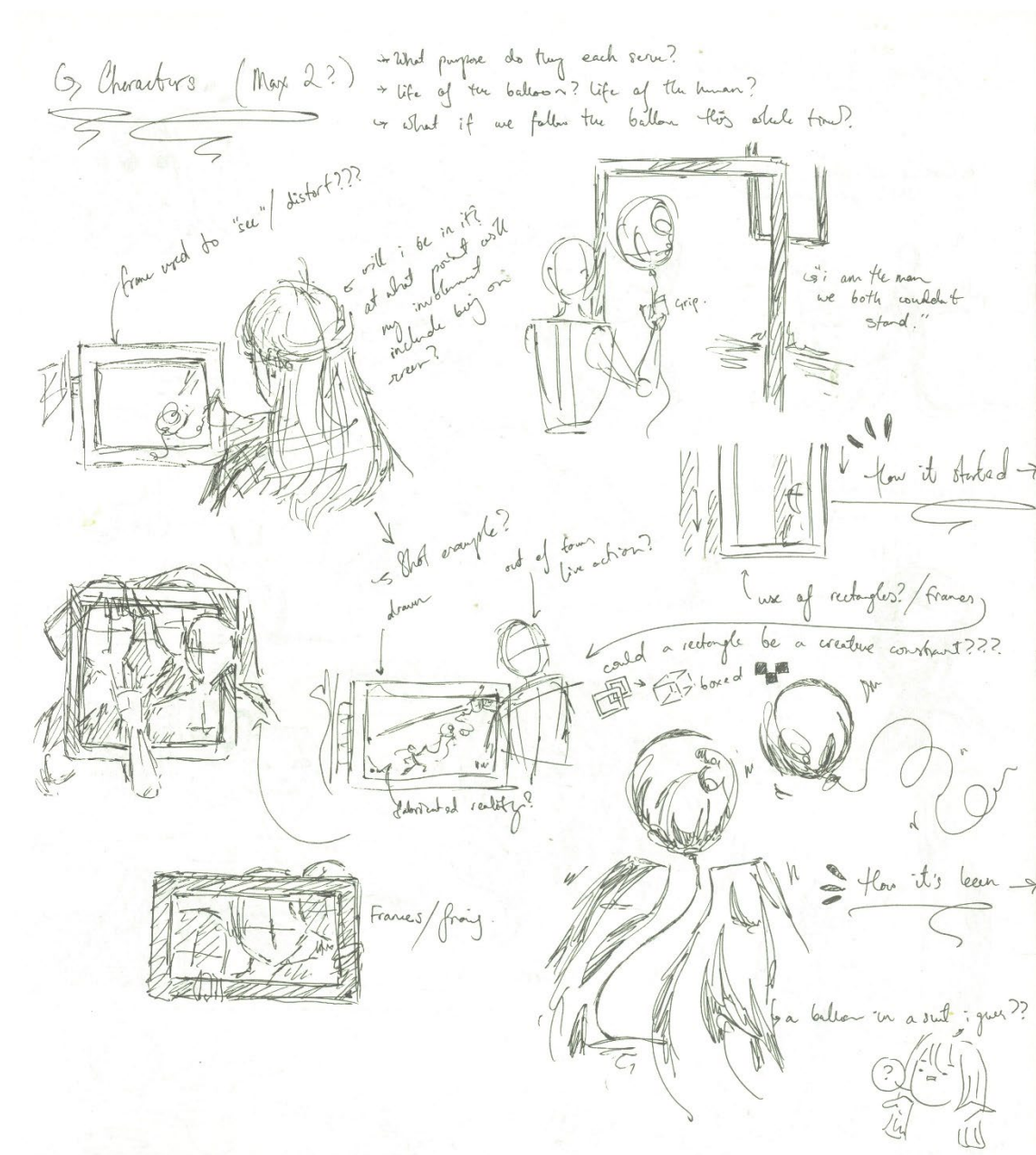


Figure 70. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Thinking about the Character*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

My character within the film is an extension of myself in a fantastically animated space. I am giving form to my feelings through this character but not drawing myself as a character. I recognise the person (the character) as if the person existed before I started sketching, slowly revealing and reflecting on what I could not articulate. Inside the character's psychology, the character understands death based on what the world has presented to the practitioner. Their thoughts reflect how I see the world as I project a subjective worldview into the animated space and person (character). With the possibilities that animation encompasses, the visuals have freedom for whimsical depictions and offer a safe space for me to navigate how I feel.

Interestingly, the cartoon drawings that overlook the workbook and bulletin board documentation also speak as an extension of myself. Essentially, the workbook contains commentary on the discoveries, contemplations and ideas through small doodles. Within these doodles is a character named *Meepoo* that I mindlessly draw as a caricature. Within research, ideas, and iterations, *Meepoo* is comforting because she is easy to draw and adds lighthearted comments or reminders.

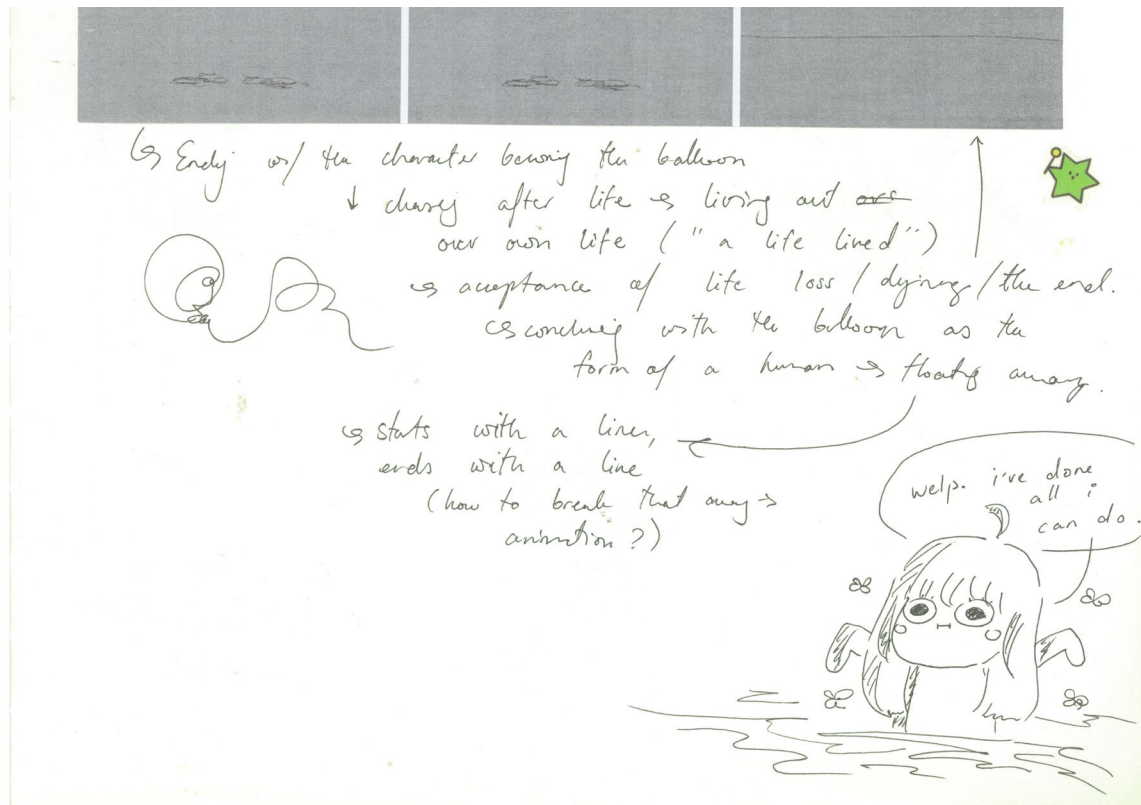


Figure 71. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation - Meepoo*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

Animatic Tests

Animatics became a way to discover through making. I used this as my form of experimental animation because the animatic was a tool to tease out the ideas. The storyboard allowed me to visually parcel the ideas out, while the animatic allowed me to move the ideas around, find new ideas and discover transitions between them. Though there are more, the following animatics best show the amount of testing within the process.

Animatic Testv1: <https://vimeo.com/695925884>

Animatic Testv5: <https://vimeo.com/695926902>

Animatic Testv14: <https://vimeo.com/695925909>

Animatic Test – Life Rewind: <https://vimeo.com/695923423>

Animatic Test – Life Rewindv2: <https://vimeo.com/695923402>

The transitions allow seamless movement from one idea or emotional space to another. The Making, Thinking and Feeling process is heavily reflected in this stage and creates opportunities for exciting compositions to drive the fluidity of the visual journey. The animatic tests are evidence of moving from a linear story (more literal or cliché representation) toward more radical surrealist and abstract ideas.

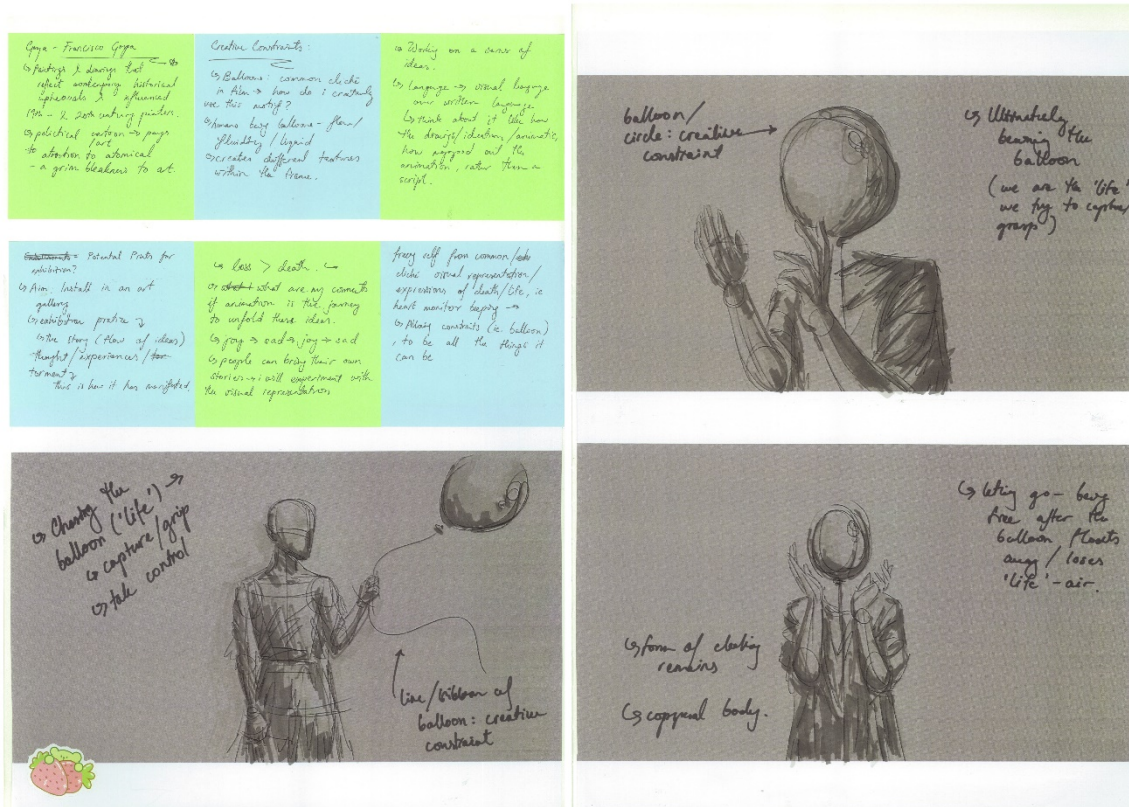


Figure 72. Lesley Ung. *Workbook Documentation – Animatic Thoughts*, 2020, scanned image, Auckland

Un Chien Andalou, *Pas de deux*, *dolefullhouse*, and *Tusalava* are creative works (mentioned in Chapter Two) with ideas behind them but not necessarily a linear story. These creative works tease out an idea, notion, concept, or feeling that informed my approach to drawing out my emotions as I encounter them.

Iterative Drawing - Thought it, Felt it, Drew it

Initially, I was reluctant to involve my feelings too heavily within the project, as it was (and still is) emotionally draining. However, as much as I wanted to avoid writing, the drawing (animation) allowed me to parcel out my feelings during the experience.

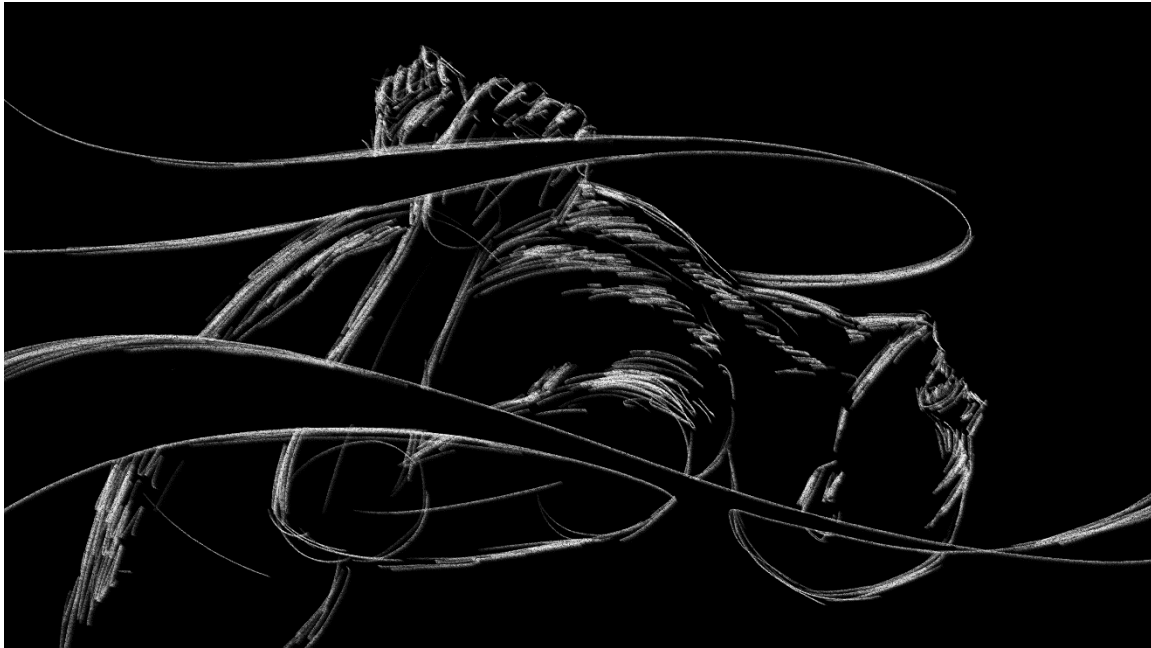


Figure 73. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - Pain*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

During this experience, I had many sleepless nights. I often woke up from nightmares that relived the past and visualised future deaths. As a result, I experienced loss daily during my restless hours. Sometimes it was deaths that had happened, and sometimes it was deaths that had not. It was strange because, while not concrete in reality or happening in real-time, I still woke up believing it.

A recurring question that took a toll on me was:

- If I were to choose whether to go first or watch those I love leave first — which would I choose?

If I leave first, I leave behind those who love me, passing grief onto them, but I get to avoid confronting turmoil. If they all leave first, I am left a blubbering mess, all alone grappling with these feelings — but they are safe from this experience. Previously, it had been easier to choose the latter because I wanted to support them to the end, making sure they were safe and not alone. After *Dénouement*, I cannot imagine what that confrontation would be like, nor am I prepared for loss again. The question I asked, however, does not have a correct answer.

A safety concern often arises due to the project's emotionally draining subject. There were the personal contemplations to contend with, where the emotions manifested into a daily ritual — to think, feel, and dream about death. The autoethnographic framework (established previously) became building blocks of the making that reinforced truthful reflections and feelings. They also brought me back to the Making, Thinking and Feeling process, which was crucial to the project and how it emerged. The turmoil I felt is evident in the set of illustrations from this stage. So far, these are the most potent, heartbreaking and demanding drawings I have created for the project.

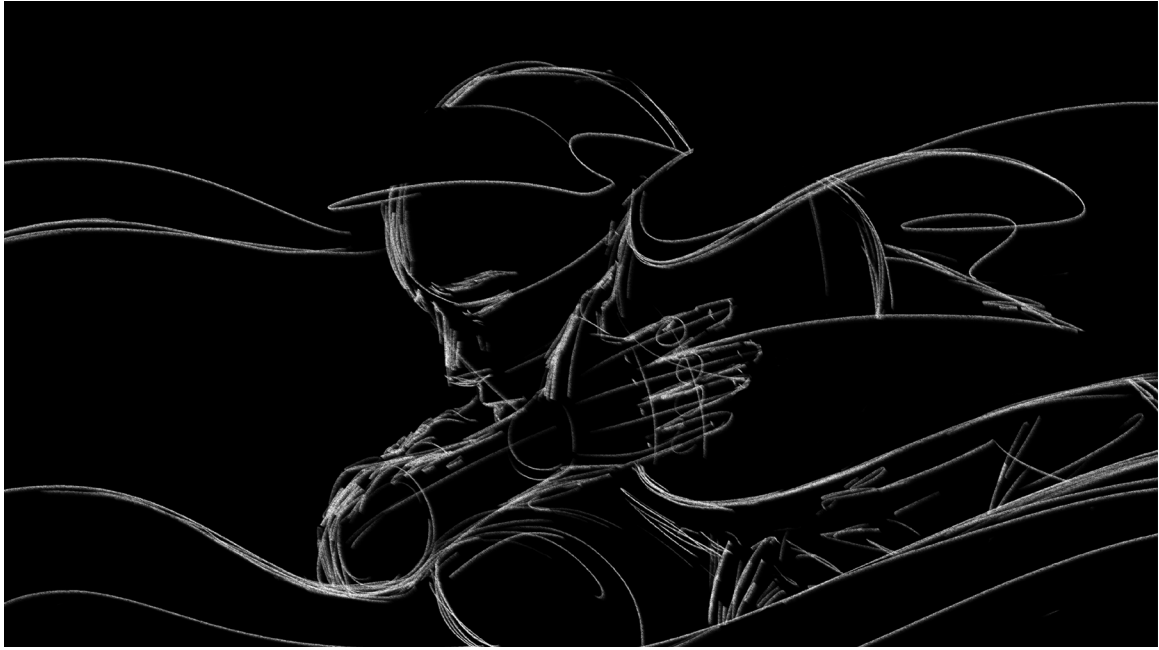


Figure 74. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - Embrace*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

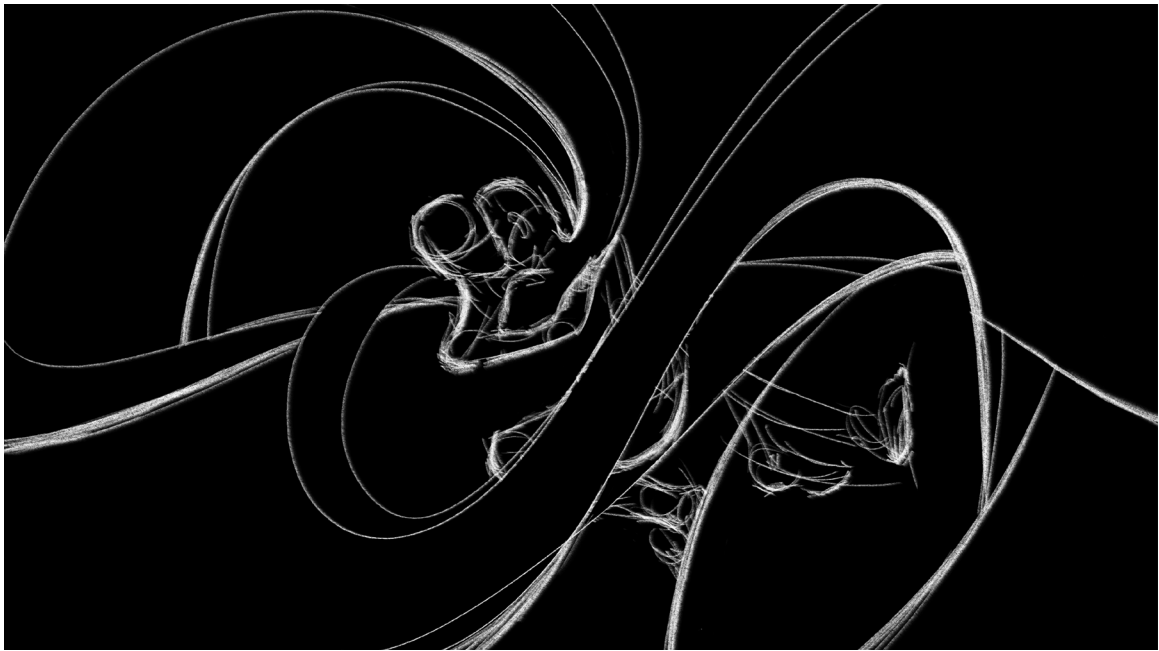


Figure 75. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - Trace*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 76. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - String*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 77. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing - Pull*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

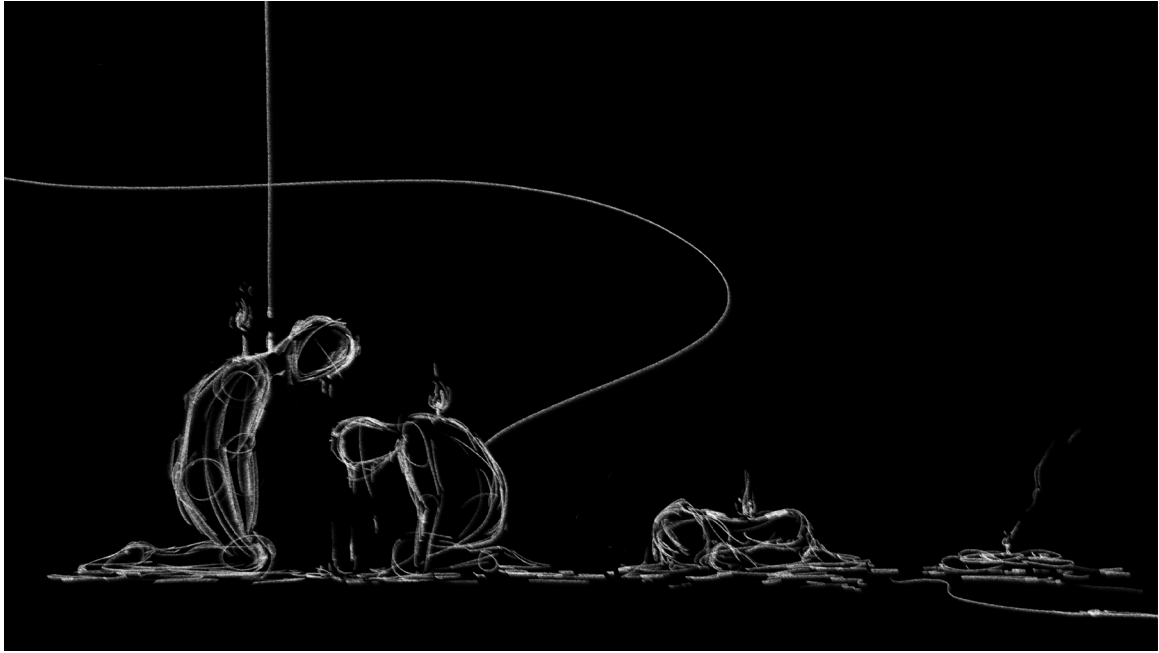


Figure 78. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Burn*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

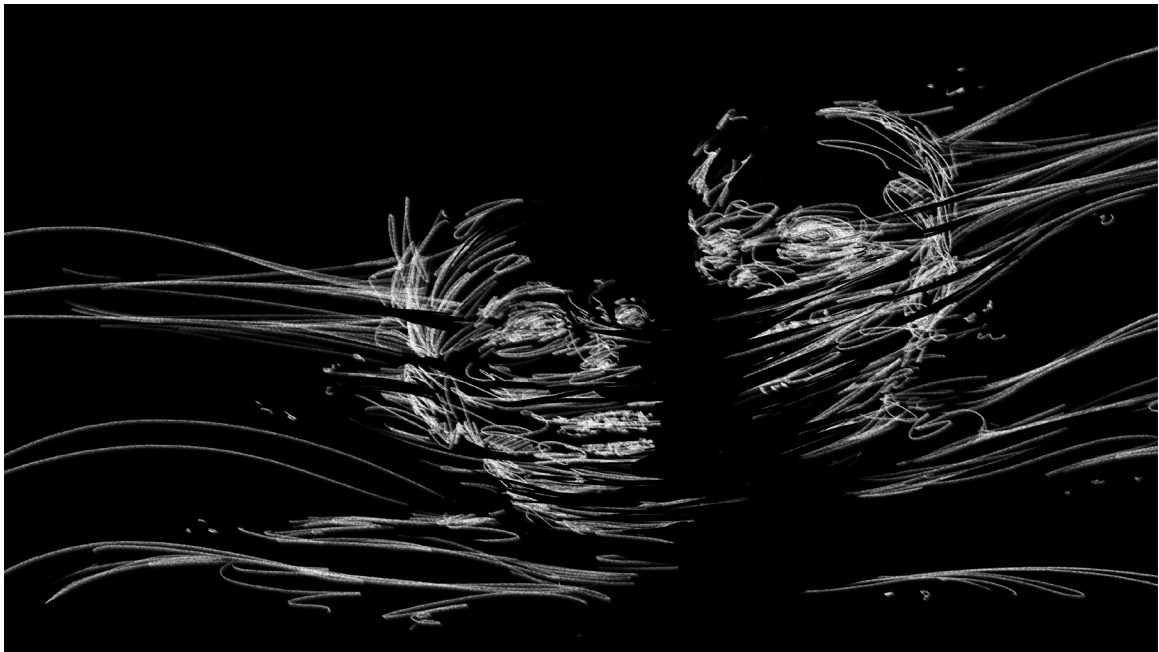


Figure 79. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Corporeal Body*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

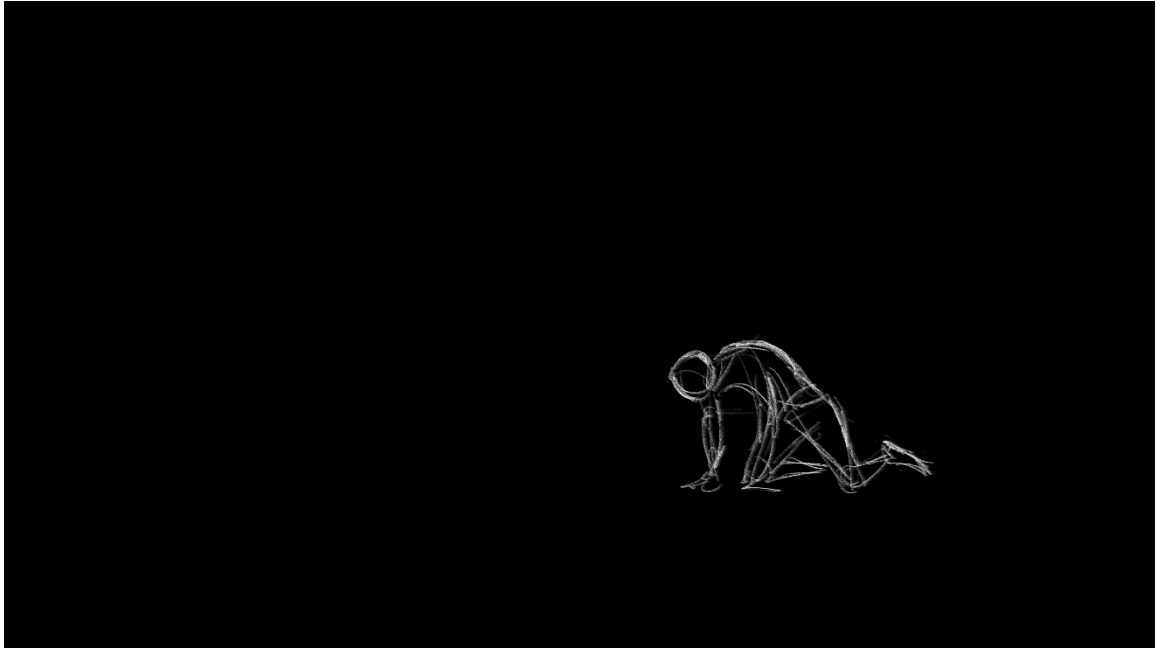


Figure 80. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Alone*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 81. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Hold*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 82. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Wrestled*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland



Figure 83. Lesley Ung. *Iterative Drawing – Tired*, 2021, digital illustration, Auckland

Sound

The sound itself is its own performance within the short. The trouble is, what I initially proposed was not working. In my tests, I used music initially purchased for the project (See Appendix 2).¹³⁶ I chose the music over a process of listening to different tracks and deciding what felt right while I was drawing.¹³⁷ However, slapping a piece of music over the work felt like an afterthought like an afterthought as a pre-made track. Designing the sound to the ideas will have a far more effective conversation between what we hear, feel, and see.

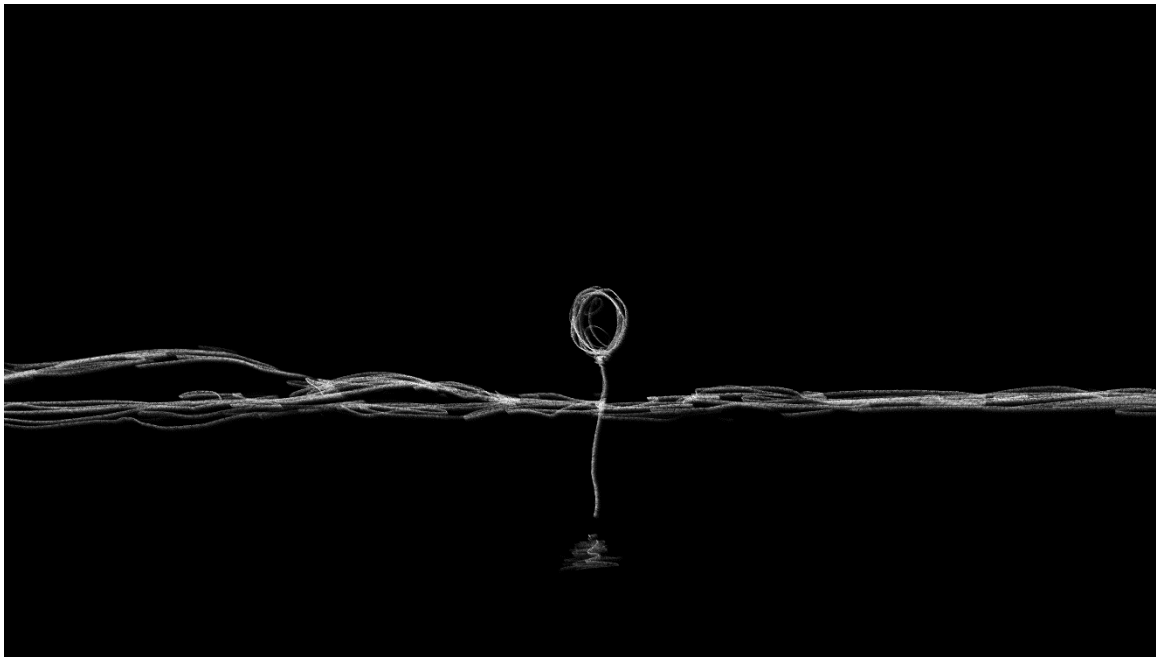


Figure 84. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Boundary – Still Frame*, 2021, digital animation, Auckland

Sound can be minimalist and simple, and I started thinking about ways to make choices to support the film that unifies both elements. I thought about using a music box track because, subjectively, there is an unnerving but also sentimental feeling behind the sound. However, I needed to be mindful, as music boxes are also cliché in film.

As a sound designer, my brother is interested particularly in soundtracks, programming¹³⁸ and Foley¹³⁹. I had us review my animatics and collaborate on a test piece for the film's sound. It included looking at the tempo changes and the softness of each key — knowing when to pull back and let silence take over. Each step of the way, I gave notes on how the images felt to me and

¹³⁶ “Sun After the Rain” by Vincent Tone with a Standard License (PremiumBeat.com)

¹³⁷ While I made iterations of my work, I also enjoyed having a soundtrack in the background to get into the mood or feelings I wanted to draw out.

¹³⁸ MIDI is an acronym for musical instrument digital interface that is a protocol that provides communication between digital musical instruments.

¹³⁹ Foley is the reproduction of everyday sound effects during the post-production stage that enhances the audio track.

asked what he felt, saw, and heard. The aim was that, instead of hearing music and trying to visualise that, I am now visualising the imagery and creating sound from it.



Figure 85. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Enter – Still Frame*, 2021, digital animation, Auckland

Animation, Editing and Polishing

Animation has always been a presence in my life. As a child, the form inspired my creative pursuits. I was (and still am) enamoured by the construction of artificial worlds, the illusion of moving images, and the creation of life in previously non-existent characters. I am an animator because of this. It feeds me, and I aim to feed my worldview and perspective through animation's multi-dimensional possibilities.

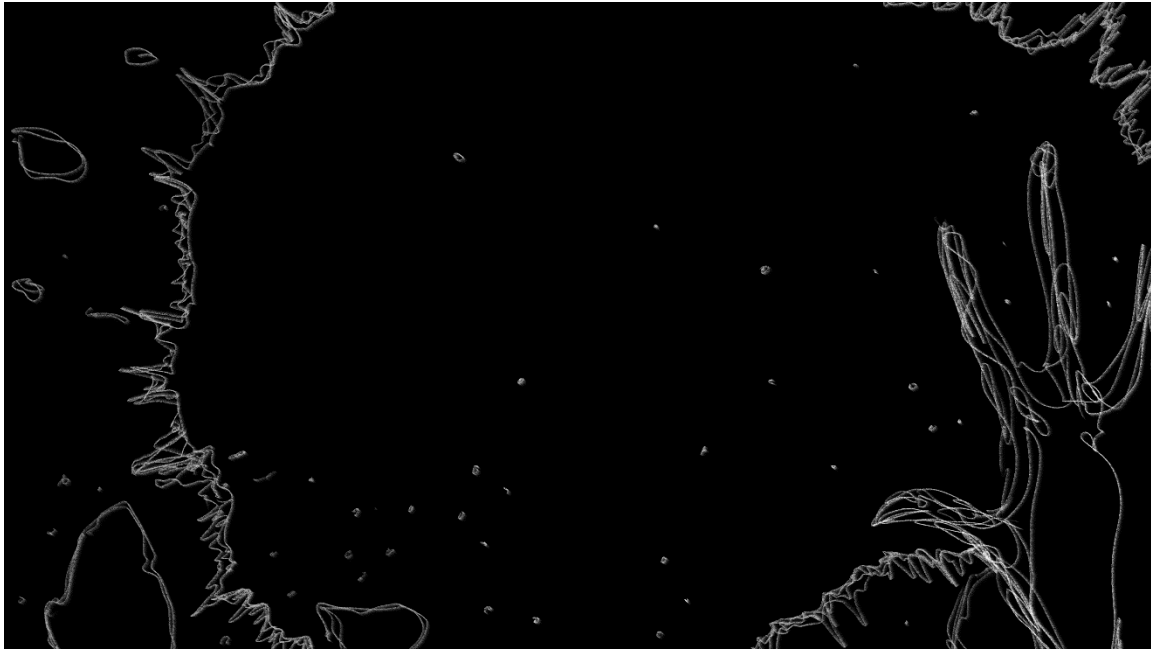


Figure 86. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Drown – Still Frame*, 2021, digital animation, Auckland

Loop Narrative Structure

The idea of a looping narrative came forth in the Context Review of Lye's *Tusalava*, as a structure, I am interested in pursuing. *Dénouement*, structurally as a looping narrative, allows a flow of ideas that segue and presents a powerful idea that time is a seamless loop in motion. The loop narrative structure is a practice-based choice that was confirmed later in the making phases of the research. In *New Temporality: Loop as a Narrative Engine*, Lev Manovich writes as follows.

The concept of a loop as an “engine” which puts the narrative in motion.¹⁴⁰

Manovich suggests that the loops in design are “a source of new possibilities for new media”, which is evident in the works of artists, Tabaimo and Gregory Bennett.¹⁴¹ A loop narrative structure upholds a cycled continuity with no beginning or end and follows ideas of dream-states that do not run in order. The audience could travel through the film at various points and still understand the navigation of feelings I am visually drawing out. A linear narrative opposes this, as it requires a set order for the events to unfold. The exciting part is that the audience can pinpoint where their story begins and ends within the looped film.

¹⁴⁰ Lev, Manovich. "The New Temporality: Loop as a Narrative Engine, the Language of New Media." 264-65 Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2002.

¹⁴¹ Gregory Bennett is a practising digital artist who works with 3D animation, motion capture, projection mapping, interactive media and virtual reality.

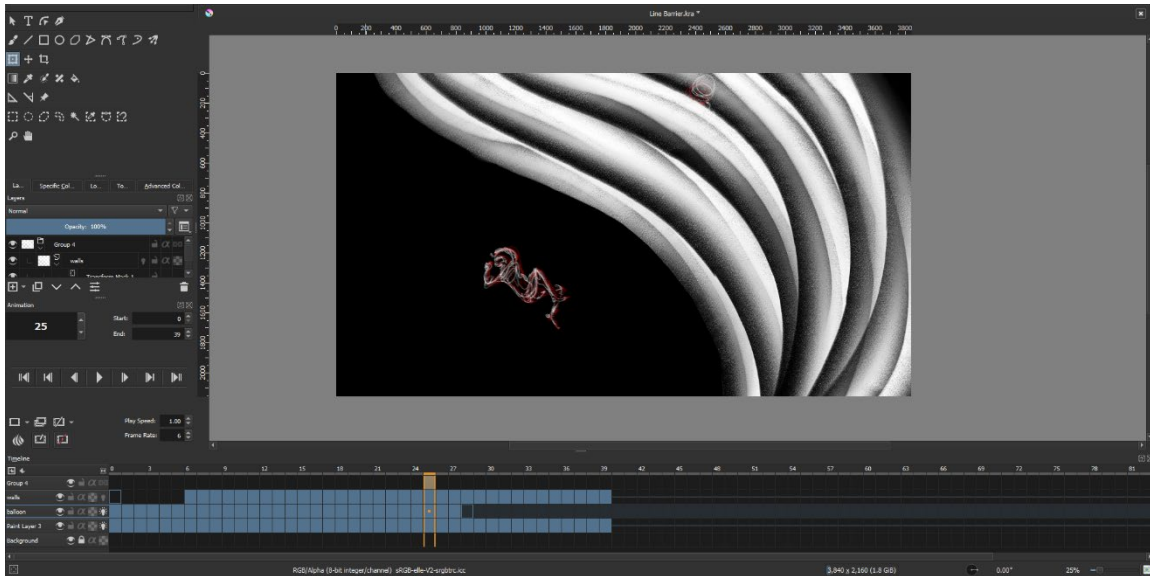


Figure 87. Lesley Ung. *Animating: Style and Transition Test*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

Animating the final shots became a performance, as the gestural and fluid-structure allowed the shots to develop, much like the approach for the animatic. The pragmatic tools required to achieve animation derive from my tacit knowledge as an animator and animation educator. During this stage, I moved scenes around to play with ideas or feelings that followed one another as they transitioned. While working through the editing phase, I reviewed each shot I created to see which ones worked and which were outliers.

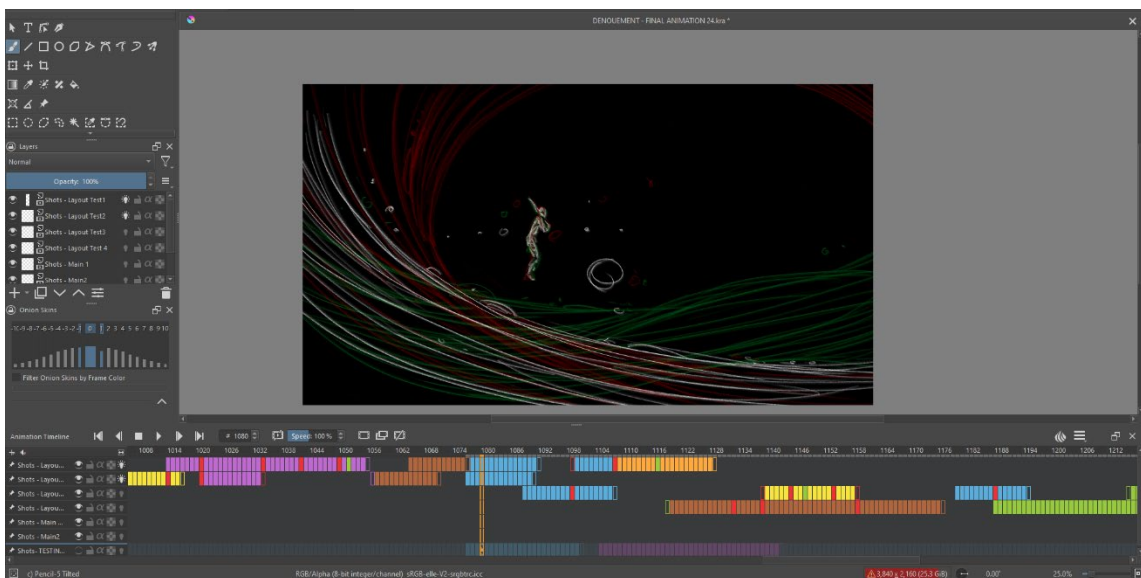


Figure 88. Lesley Ung. *Animating: Finding Transitions*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

Building bridges between the shots proved challenging at times but also immensely gratifying. When a shot would travel to the next one seamlessly, it was a beautiful flow of feelings unravelling. However, when the shots did not work, it was unmistakable, with common issues of timing, pacing, and starkness against the other visuals. The individual frames were malleable, so

I discovered the transitions through overlap, testing and translating the emotion I felt during the time.

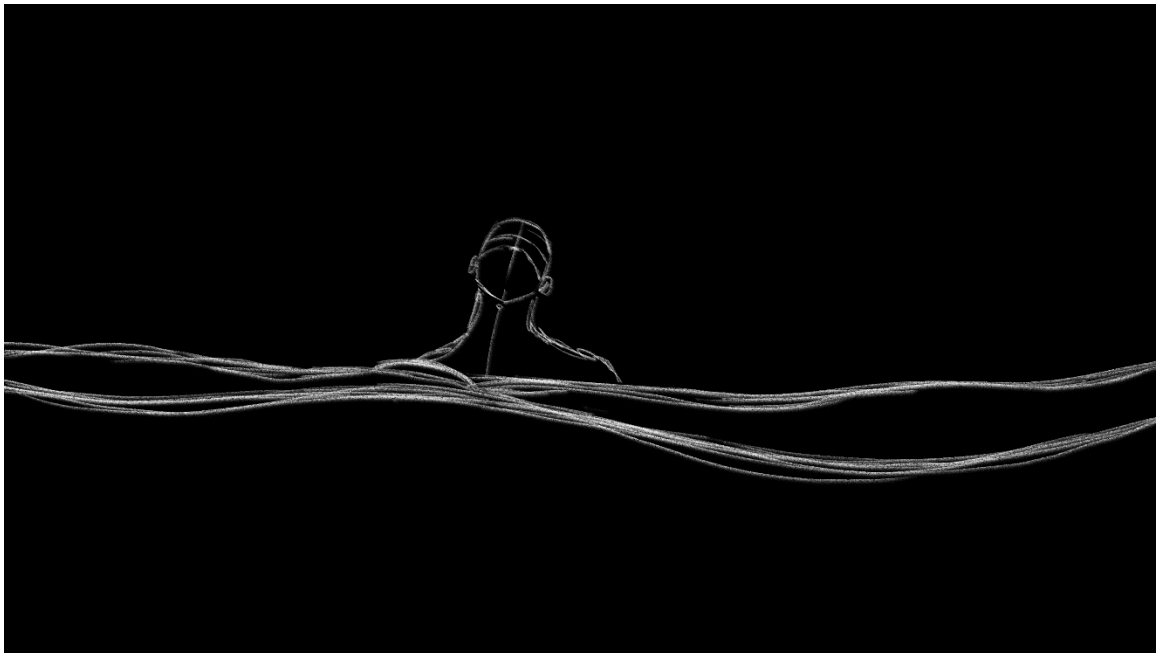


Figure 89. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Float – Still Frame*, 2021, digital animation, Auckland

Alongside this, I was developing new ideas and iterations of the shots. I also removed things that did not serve the film. For example, I tried to use a different sizing for brushes, hoping to get some dynamic lines and shading for the animation (see Figure 87). The test shot worked wonderfully as a static frame, but I found stylisation very jarring in motion. While it was a fun test, ultimately, it did not fit with the film and emotional states I was visualising.

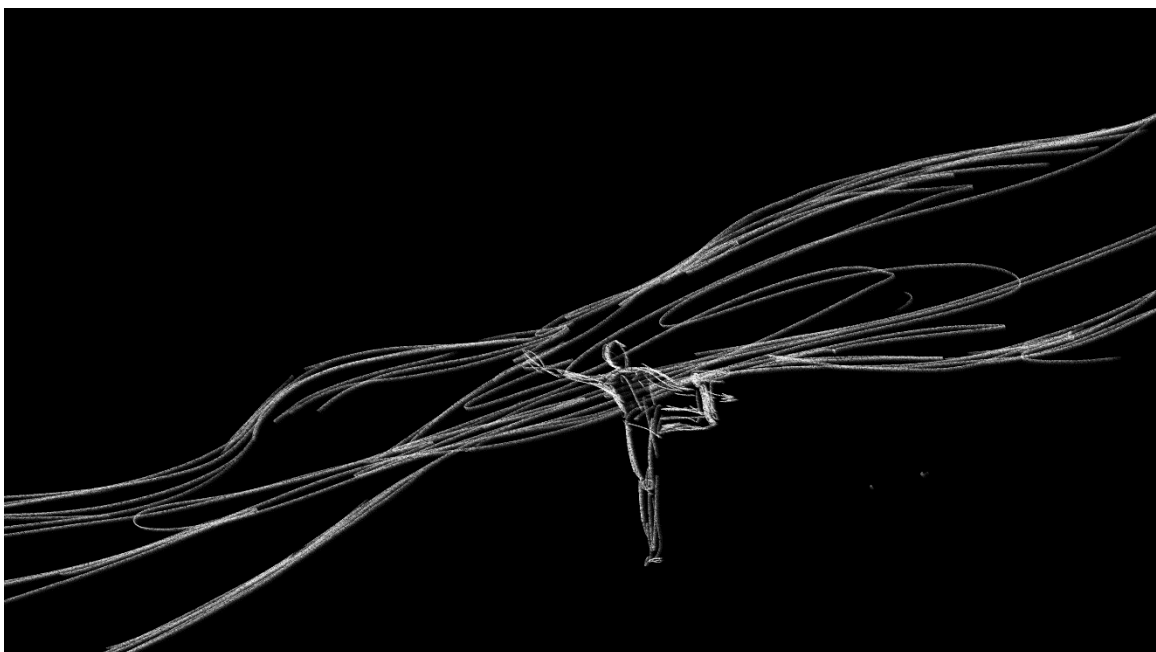


Figure 90. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Jump – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

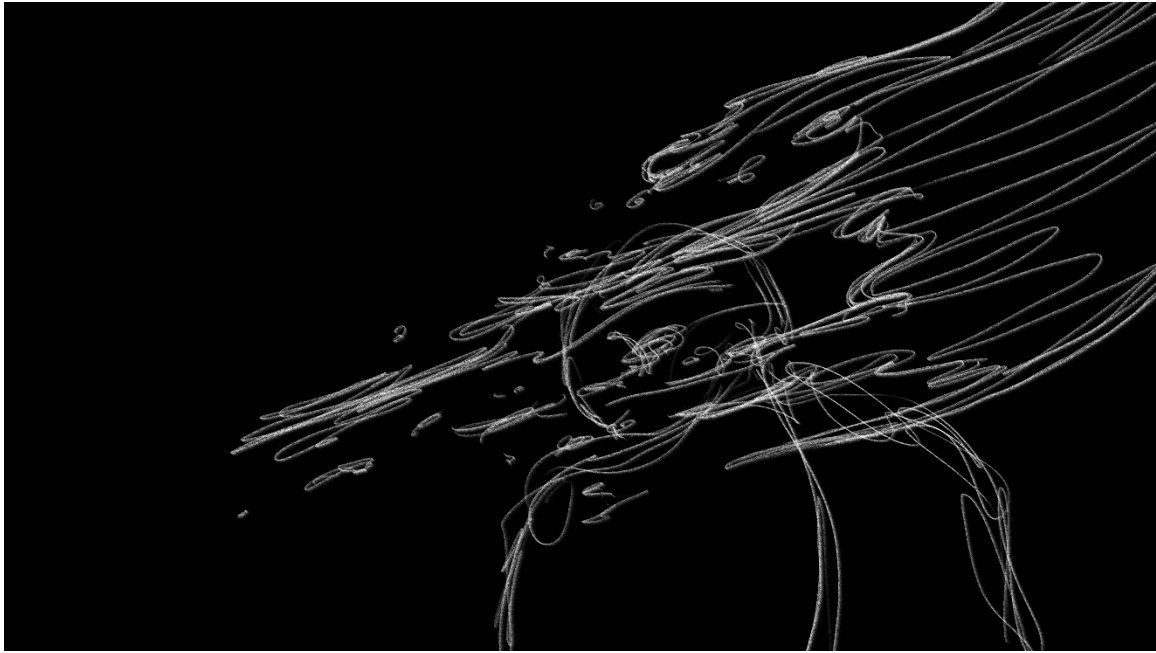


Figure 91. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Back – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

In terms of audio, I decided that depending on the context of the film, it can have the original audio or silence. The film may run as a loop without sound in a gallery context, embracing the ambience of the physical surrounding. In an online film festival context, it may include the intended audio to echo the practitioner's lens further as a submission. The film is open to both takes, where silence allows an audience to bring their own subjective sounds and soundtrack to the experience — parallel to the ideas behind the visuals. On the other end, the original sound design is subjective to my experience and offers an inkling into how I saw my grieving process. Both are poetic and meaningful but depend on the viewer for what resonates with them more, which I am open to discussing.

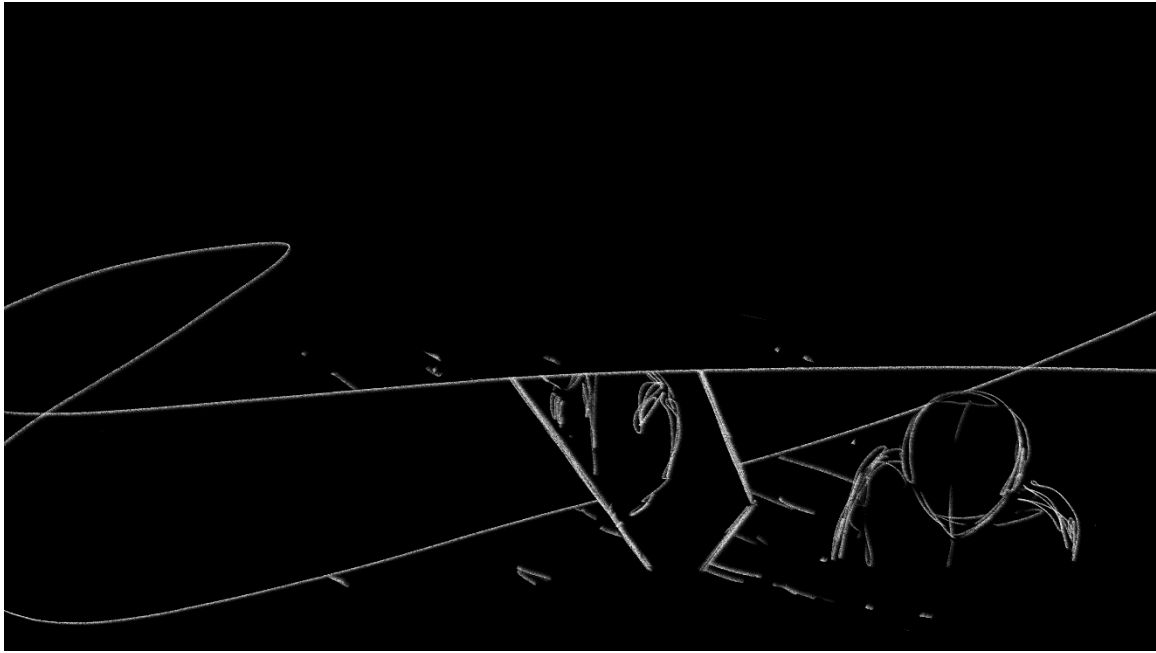


Figure 92. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Double – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

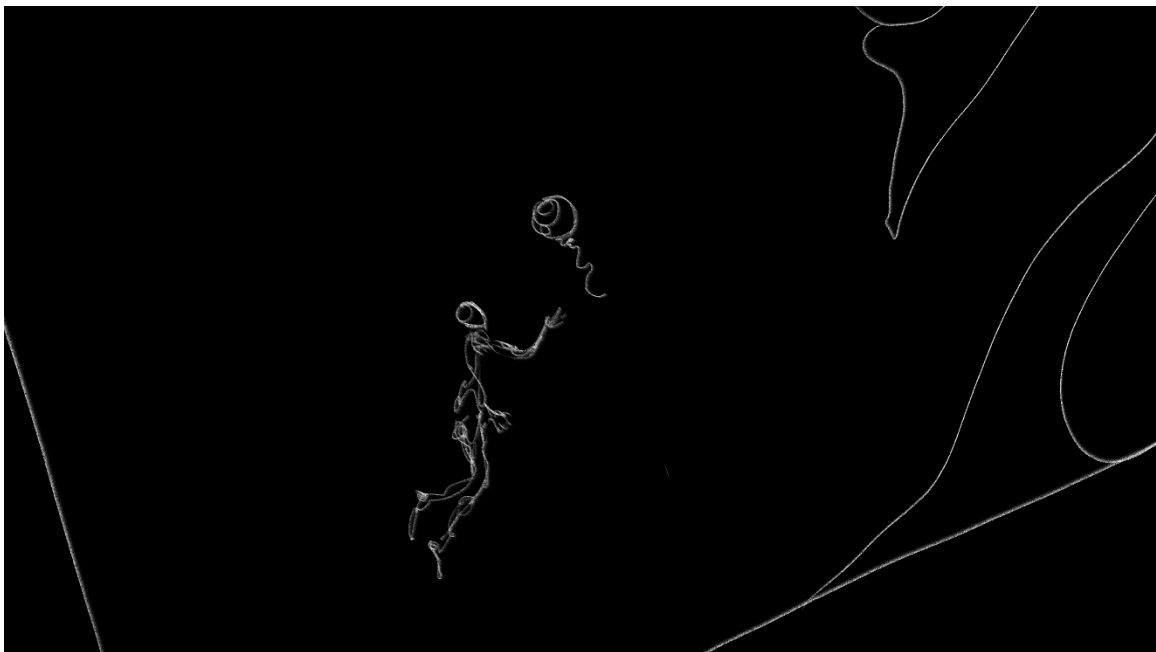


Figure 93. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Reach – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland



Figure 94. Lesley Ung. *Shots: Halt – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland



Figure 95. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Grasp – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

The practice also became a mode of coping through rising melancholy, so in ways, the animating process truly becomes a powerful healing agent. The fragile sketches emerged during production and finalised themselves in my journey to grapple with loss, capturing fingerprints as part of the performance (of the practice).

For a topic as confronting as death, the tactile quality of illustrating movement feels like a natural progression from the research gathered. The gratification of drawing out frames threading into a

string of motion kept me returning to the film because there is beauty through the practice, even when it is difficult, gruelling and distressing.

The final film has now become my most challenging, frustrating and significant milestone as a practitioner.

Dénouement – Final: <https://vimeo.com/715009744>



Conclusion

Dénouement engages with the experience of losing a loved one as a practice-based research project. Through thinking, making and feeling processes, the project asks whether hand-drawn animation might be a tool to grapple with loss and is informed by autoethnographic inquiry and making methods such as ideation drawing, iterative drawing and selected dramaturgical tools. As a practitioner and researcher, I developed a toolkit to distil and refine this ongoing conversation through the medium of animation, exploring death, loss and grief.

Alongside this, I have concluded my most significant project to date in terms of quality, scope, and emotional weight. Future endeavours might expand on the relevance of using animation's traditional form (animating with *cel sheets* and paper, rather than digital drawing) in the conversation of death or other difficult subjects. It may also expand on other approaches to understanding grief and models that offer other theoretical musings. It will be enlightening to revisit the project as I imagine my understanding will change over time, having encountered more life experiences.

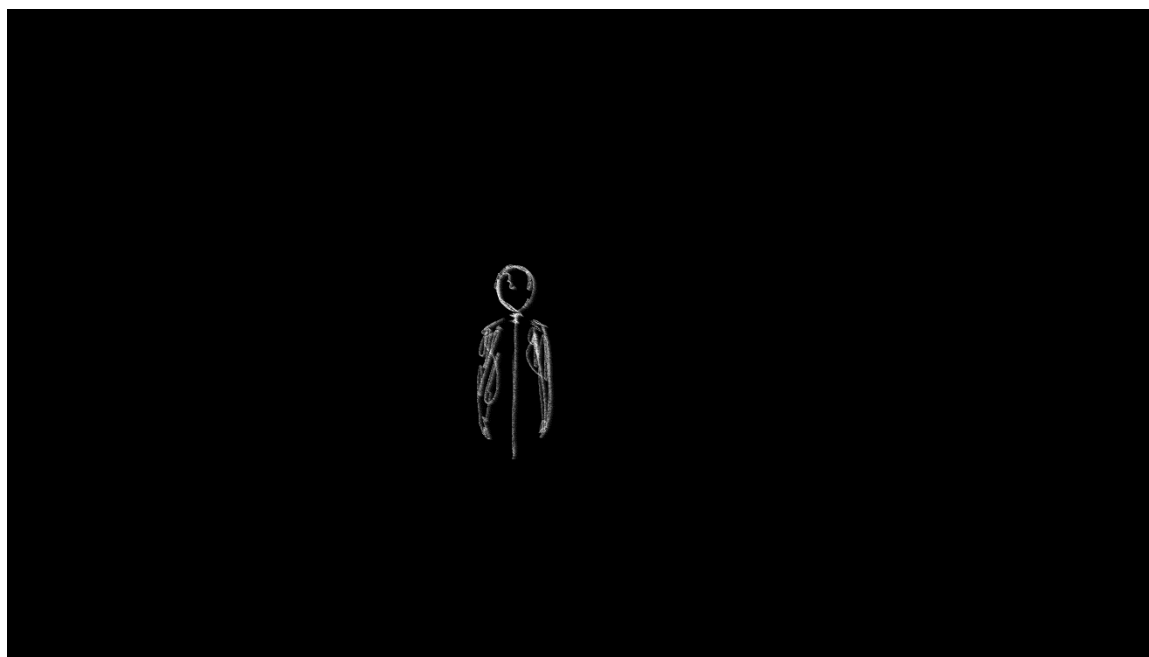


Figure 96. Lesley Ung. *Shot: Leave – Still Frame*, 2022, digital animation, Auckland

Engaging in Masters research has shaped, shifted, and transformed me as a practitioner, person, and researcher. The little artist who was told she would never amount to anything sits here, writing the closure of this chapter. I did this project for that little artist and the people I love and will continue to draw stories I want to tell, full of emotion, passion and empathy.

The project has wrapped up at its final stage, closing the chapter on this journey as its own *dénouement*. With that, I leave you to experience the work and hopefully spark thoughtful conversations about loss and grieving, framed in human experience.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Additional Workbook Documentation Pages

Animation Pencil Tests

20 different animators have sketched the emotional parts of the story, through the various digital media.

1. Anger

Recreating one of the title pages of *Anger*.

2. Depression

Recreating one of the title pages of *Gift*.

3. Drugged

Recreating one of the title pages of *Gift*.

the notes work - reads more interesting & grade & feedback

Other: study of facial expressions & convey that expression/body language.

Can move from to it

holds back in the abstract representation

how could you show the emotion abstractly?

↳ always myself to see how facial animation in pencil test simulation

↳ less refined & flat

↳ this depending on style, rigidity, weight in way way for representation & simulation.

↳ a world troubled through personality

↳ Try: Use of solid - abstract lines better to character from way formula.

↳ how

↳ Time per word? 8 fps, 12 fps, 24 fps

↳ not comfortable & double on the time from + hour for their production trial.

↳ human head, uses lines to sketch up a character - can be seen as more classical is including puzzle piece/abstract way

↳ Emotion symbol reflects the mood (position, beard, hair, bone), form is your face, clothing is your a sense of the mood (clothes, posture).

↳ Explains the human eye, ability to look down, looking/looking more.

↳ introducing butterfly/moth (beauty) and has a connection between to dots/style.

↳ most detailed, shading/refinement lines.

↳ makes the bottom replacing the human head & how the other create the body/arm of a human character.

↳ inspired to talk about life (beauty) & reflection → less of anatomy & reflections of the human in a mirror/cell.

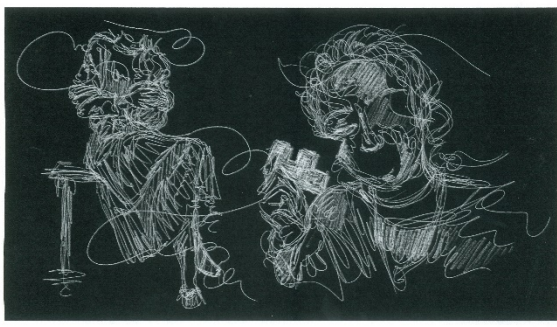
↳ allow more flow/loosely/rounded lines to hold together, rather than ridged over.

↳ make shadowed the line (thicker) when the backbone (darker) & heavy, empty space (in other, blue, white) in his impression.

↳ making the neck/eye so you can see that can be shadowed with a line/ribbon of bottom (pencil).

body form/anatomy ("creation")
 ↳ headless / motion → lines wrapping around
 ↳ flow / rhythm?

↳ washed lines removed from the body → gentle off lines.



↳ define lines the only part that holds form
 ↳ pointing to the eyes
 ↳ about what the human character is made of

↳ provide pieces, missing facial pieces/anatomy.
 ↳ important pieces?
 ↳ negative space.

↳ water: lines unravel into stream/ripples.
 ↳ adjustment → neck held by balloon ribbon.

↳ rounded
 ↳ in motion?
 ↳ wrapping this around the neck (knit) → loss of look
 ↳ nose



↳ water fall:
 ↳ gravity affecting it?

↳ balloon head → nose related
 ↳ pulling/dragging.
 ↳ control?

↳ what happens if you pull it, does the head disintegrate?

↳ up to interpretation: "it's like a pile of rubble or a hand?"

↳ shading color
 ↳ "it's not working the back black & white"

↳ What does an audience see amongst this?



↳ balloon on a pile of rubble/lines or a film matrix
 ↳ the head of an ear shell etc (hard or chalky)

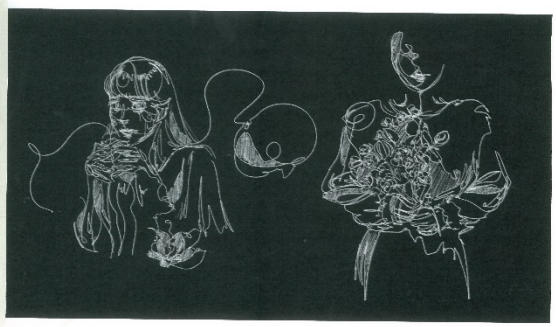
↳ play with color against the black bg.
 ↳ possible: looking at specific areas to color/emphasis.
 ↳ the girl in the red red coat

↳ "Shirley's List" Reference → negative; specific to draw the audience to an object there/idea.

↳ responding/build up of form (body up?)
 ↳ eye - black & white?

↳ holds/pieces/build up.
 ↳ play of black & white form for animation.

↳ balloon holds on a hand/deregulation.

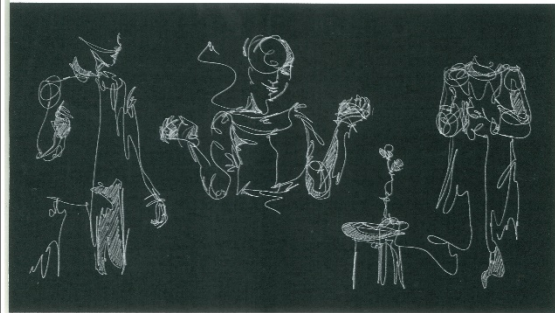
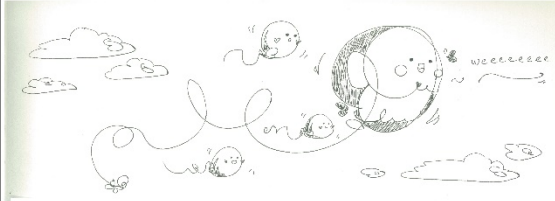


↳ motion highlighted by facial features → is eye
 ↳ hands.

↳ This can be a debasing factor of what the character than for close up/body

↳ lying in flowers, being plants
 ↳ turning point: the moment was identified as a moment to a funeral
 ↳ is audience why it is death

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Even simpler lines that flow w/ the rhythm of the line/clothing forms.
 ↳ wanting to play with more abstract form
 ↳ simplified into even less lines. This means it can be an extreme choice or a challenge of the narrative when shifts happen.

↳ also coming in other parts of the sketch adds dimension - less flat & ready to lay over.

↳ less pulling the audience in & out of the shot.

↳ the lines/flow change of the character, with lines pulling away like ripples on a pond.

↳ potential function of pulling away the character of line.

↳ use the need to represent loss of life/end

↳ below deforming elongated → perhaps so that it can merge into other things → the circle & cloudy changes?



↳ expression is shown but respectful of the unfinished body → loss of the original body.

↳ character looking away from the camera/audience → never breaking the 4th wall until the end.

↳ life grows from the neck of the character as mouth/atrophies fly out from their spine.

↳ head/drawn of lines carry the viewer → transitions.

circles around appears → balloon → after appears

Copy test (idea): 3 on line drawn in backhand/left line → forms a word/human within → longform.

Water: Pencil Test **Hands: Pencil Test**

Pencil tests:
 allow for me to discover the negative choices I need to make →
 white line on black by + introducing environments (cuts / land).

Storyboard Test 2:

view notes after every idea - cinematic trial →

Shot 1: title words
 Shot 2: introduced drop
 Shot 3: Randomness
 Shot 4: hang/close up.

Shot 5: balloon hang.
 Shot 6: Run
 Shot 7: Run Street, run (open wide shot run)
 Shot 8: Pause.

Notes:
 "should start longer: build up the title for a 20 sec rule at least → transition into movie city off →"
 "in needs more time held here / pausing → readjust"
 "idea: what if we had the sounds of the beads and/or stuffy up / clothing - we know the balloon blowing up → a beeping/shifting to open the shot?"

a line is just a disconnected circle → circle of life/circle of death.

Shot 1: title words
 Shot 2: introduced drop
 Shot 3: Randomness
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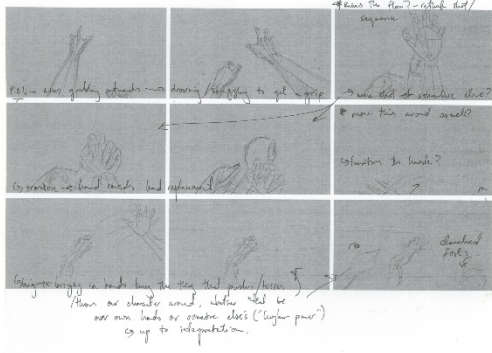
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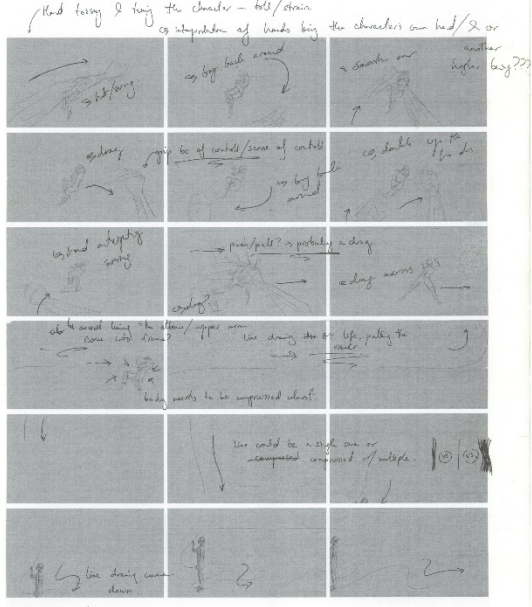
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 "idea: what if we had the sounds of the beads and/or stuffy up / clothing - we know the balloon blowing up → a beeping/shifting to open the shot?"

- Shot 9: Fall
- Shot 10: P.O.V. down/down
- Shot 11: arms reach out
- Shot 12: first reveal as now glid around?
- Shot 13: tossed up now transition overall?



- additional camera motion?
- what if like the character is on the floor, camera adds to the shot of falling & rising?
- writing falls off what the transition too harsh perhaps? → not really to → flow seems broken.

- Shot 13: tossed can't → (program transition doesn't work)
- Shot 14: line intersects
- Shot 15: Standing



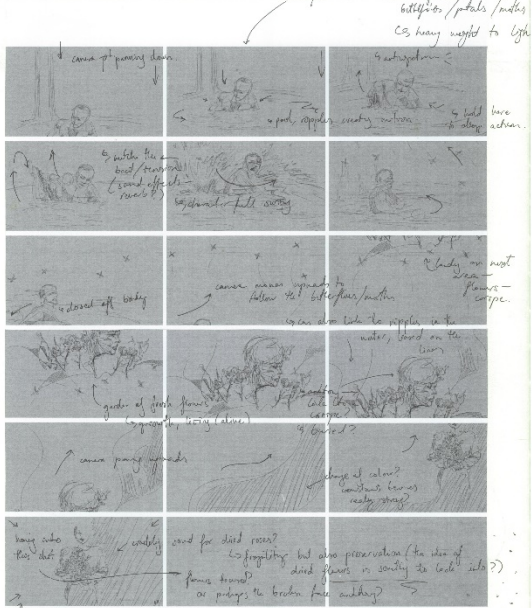
- the camera is over the shot.
- can hold on for longer.

- Shot 16: Open
- Shot 17: cuffed (eyes lowered / cuffed hands falling).
- Shot 18: Rain (waterfall).



- camera panning down, slow the tempo of the animation → just a long line.

- Shot 19: Water
- Shot 20: Bird of roses.
- Shot 21: dried roses.

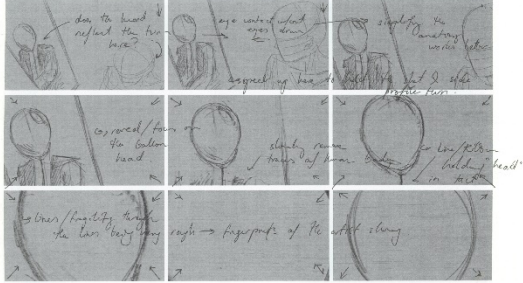


- dried flowers, compared to fish can't → how to draw that & combine it?
- fishy petals → transition from butterflies/rosettes?

Shot 22: Mirror.
 Shot 23: Nose. > transition circle, play of sand effects.
 some enhance motion.

for wing weight:
 Co-scheraphone.

outlined shot, play of angles + slow motion (leading up as it comes down + close to figure 2)

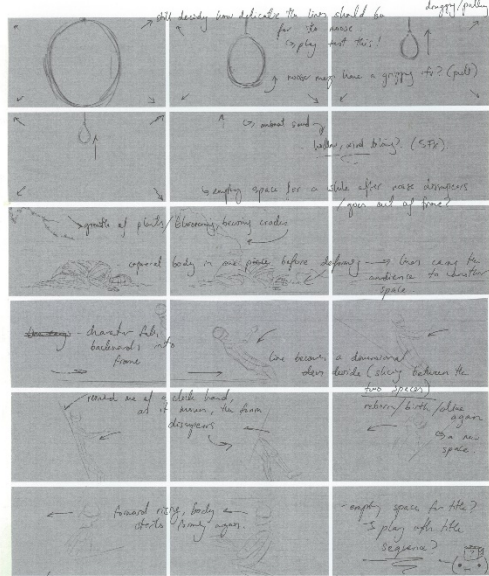


↳ going into empty space/empty frame & hold
 ↳ going back outside revealing a nose
 ↳ create content of the circle.



* literal → symbolic
 ↳ main way from form/ambivalent.
 ↳ giving form to invisible/unplayable.
 ↳ even/life force/presence of energy.
 ↳ strong capability of emotion
 ↳ stoicism/denial.

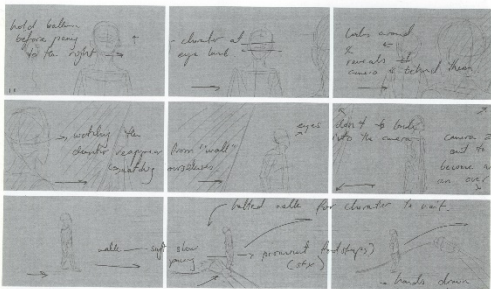
Shot 23: Nose cont.
 Shot 24: Floor



↳ using the world as it is psychologically drenched through.

→ not it expands to transition into the empty space/negative space.

Shot 25: Dimension (fatty beard + forehead).
 Shot 26: Reflection (reality).
 Shot 27: Entrance writing.



↳ reflection holding past more?

↳ the conversation between the internal, psychological & abstract dialogue for a person grappling of death.

Shot 28: Ending Realisation. (with balloon & lines).

↳ the conclusion slows down the shot
 ↳ even ends?
 ↳ empty feeling?

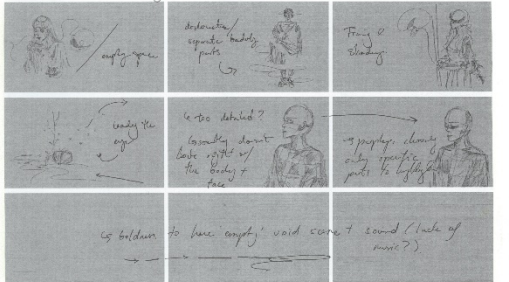


↳ perhaps the lines pull out, rather than hold the shape line as the life in

↳ What the film:
 ↳ more and more / frames, general editing (clean up & beauty).
 ↳ sound design (played with sound effects, pings/beeps of music).

↳ interestingly, along myself to how ideas within the shot but
 ↳ over so important. ↳ silence with music (adds to the emotion, better results.)
 ↳ create through rekey: ↳ develops new idea/frame / cuts based on what i had to ignore on them

↳ There is no correct answer on what is it to live or what death will be like. Simply put, it is a short that has different answers for different people, based on what they think long & death is, and will be.



↳ Perhaps we go into the short with expectations for answers; do not have? How is what is "making death?"

↳ Maybe Death??
 ↳ Maybe Life??
 ↳ Perhaps, only if the film suggests that we need life after we experience death?

↳ What's next? ↳ animating & writing ↳ we're struggling

↳ New Story Sequence: more ideas around → Sound (importance of it & plays off ideas early).

↳ silence/black screen as drifting noises/beeps/machinery chugging for best answer? → live draw in → music also builds up ↳ bring in more sound effects for ambience, humming/rolling/water ("dreaming")

↳ Notes: discussion ↳ how ideas? ↳ how we've been failing → display of topic due to the weight of it / being too close to the subject. ↳ feelings / understanding of what makes / choices & what doesn't. ↳ handles beauty about the filmmaker. ↳ table about design shots / repeatedly trying to complete a shot = ideas of wanting to step back from the picture.

↳ "meaning" rather than "intention": ↳ being was a successful meaningful life, rather than living a life with an "intention": what does that mean or look like? ↳ one lives - being away without it, because we know there is an end to it. ↳ set out values/meaning in the human pursuit, the others do do extraordinary things. ↳ dealing with death as being shadows & influence in the world.

↳ I would like to know if you hope that people (and) society then educate people & hope they are understood. ↳ Walt Disney
 ↳ You can't let go. But I will go as far as I can.
 ↳ You can't go but I'll go as far as I can.

<p>Materiality</p> <p>↳ reduce the necessity of cinema as a unified chain of film images. we might instead draw cinema's material existence =</p> <p>↳ 0:10</p>	<p>"Made with Gravity"</p> <p>↳ Always in a way that looks & feels like the drawings of real people in motion. how they would act. whether ideas</p> <p>↳ there are not drawings, there are characters. animation is more than just making a picture move, it's creating the illusion of life.</p>	<p>↳ in terms of animation, accidents are actors as well. they are fantastic actors. They have to draw from how they feel emotionally about the best of a scene that they're working on. they work collectively. ↳ Andy Serkis</p>
<p>↳ embody myself within animation. ↳ little clear explanation to be able to go into this. ↳ more hand with the character, obvious in how I spend a couple extra hours create something that looks like I myself</p>	<p>↳ it's not about making drawings, it's about drawings that move people! ↳ later times. ↳ for most pictures → mostly pictures (cinematography speaking) ↳ John Coatsworth</p>	<p>↳ Animation can explain what we can't see. ↳ this facilitates makes the most variable & explicit means of communication yet devised for quick mass appreciation.</p>
<p>↳ Draw is giving a performance; an artist is not limited by the body, only by his ability to perhaps experience. ↳ More draws.</p>	<p>Creative Constraints</p> <p>↳ With animation because you can draw anything & do anything & there's the character do whatever you want, the tendency is to be very loose with the boundaries of the rules. ↳ Matt Groening</p>	<p>↳ Animation is a technique, not a genre. ↳ why this practice? ↳ (read book) ↳ it's not a genre, animation is a art form & it can do any genre. ↳ not too/a medium</p>
<p>↳ Being made that you are not just animating movement, you are animating feelings. ↳ this intention: ↳ that about what is you character thinks & how do they feel that way?</p>	<p>↳ Animation means to make life, not to imitate it. ↳ check Jones. ↳ being up / can borrow from cartoons. ↳ Plan of reference → pick the best poses & exaggerate them. ↳ result in that animation when restricted to a c.a.).</p>	<p>↳ Animation can reach into places where live action doesn't go, and it seems like all of animation knowledge is trying to go where live action can't. ↳ ...</p>

Animatic: Restrictive ideas.

Animatic - Tool

↳ Take out visual/subject matter ideas → another draft → refine → resolve.

↳ plan/numbered slides: finding order way to combine their ideas. ↳ create way to present the ideas/creative constraints.

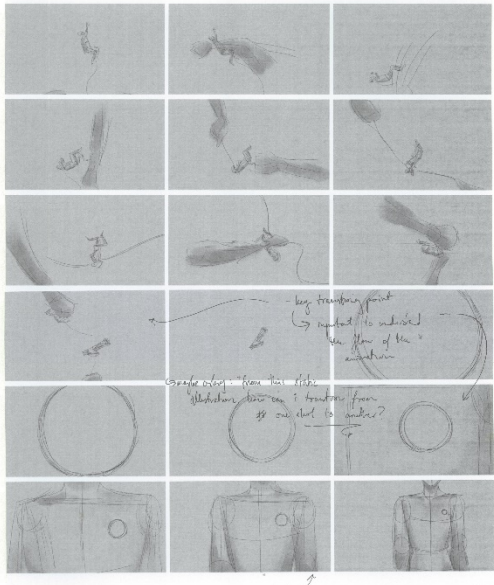
↳ take like this you don't make anyone. ↳ see with the work quickly.

↳ this part of the process of person getting used up. ↳ it's not about making a better, also making it into a better character.

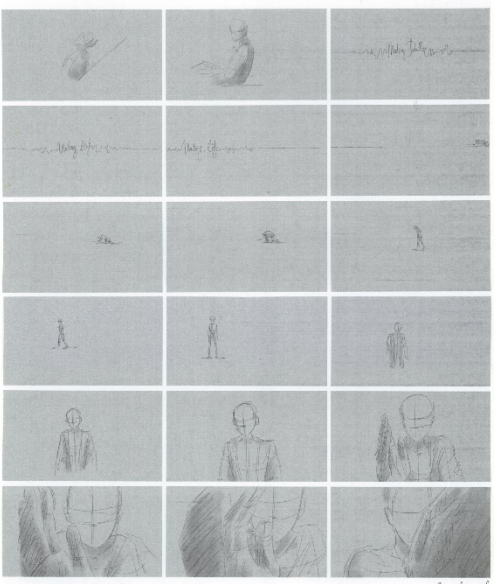
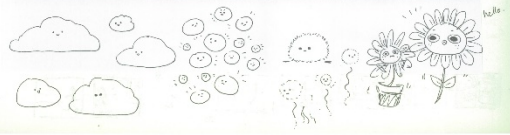
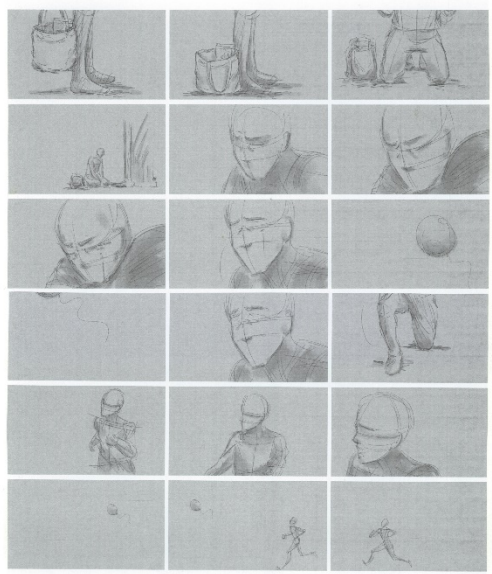
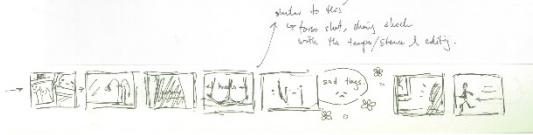
↳ Animation can reach into places where live action doesn't go, and it seems like all of animation knowledge is trying to go where live action can't. ↳ ...

↳ Remember ideas of spirit of a narrative. ↳ what with being joyful? ↳ did of the shot? ↳ when being? ↳ establish the character, making the better, also making better? ↳ is there a need for this? ↳ character?

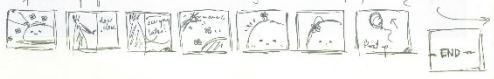
↳ change response layout? ↳ character? ↳ character? ↳ character?



by framing point
 ↳ needed to understand the flow of the animation
 ↳ construction from two states
 ↳ distribution between 1 transition frame
 ↳ so not dead to center?

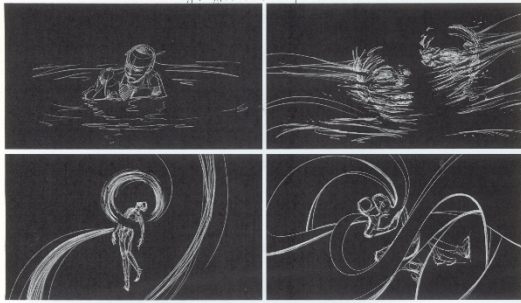


Understand the body:
 ↳ spatial epiphany → what is the character looking like? Character's perspective?
 ↳ secondary character ideas?

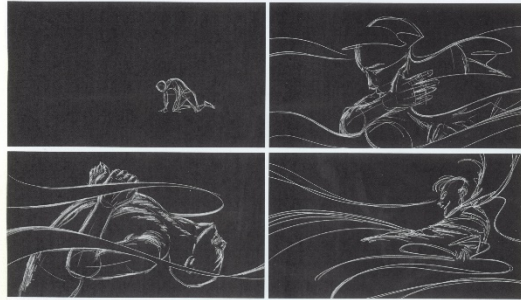


Send: story and problem
 ↳ not a great book
 ↳ hand picked
 ↳ number of scenes
 ↳ in order
 ↳ (not about the technology)
 ↳ number of images that reflect this in order
 ↳ repetition of word (like image)
 ↳ quality of both elements

my thoughts have changed & moved on →



discovery of negative space & making the most of nothing

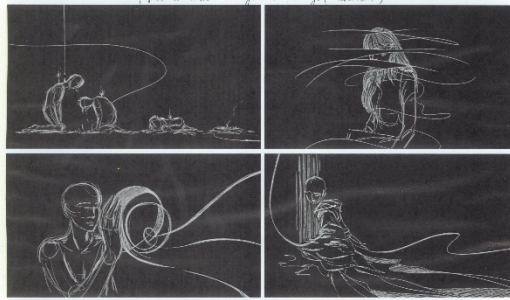


potential ideas/ words of interest

- ↳ return sounds to the sky
- ↳ this for hands
- ↳ Ashurst, Belmont
- ↳ go as far as you can
- ↳ last days
- ↳ to death to no part
- ↳ ~~to~~ all the things i can be

loss > death

creative features within the frames (stronger, smaller)



Play critical distance with a 'break' - a change of visuals & ideas

- ↳ paving the pathing more and find out more ways to visualize the ideas
- ↳ dream don't run in order - narrative structure relation? (think about that for longer)
- ↳ Order is in the ideas & thinking from one to another

Experimental filmmaking

- ↳ along the film to make itself / time or identity
- ↳ it would take care to have a loop of flowing ideas that don't hit each other
- ↳ rather than → we are born
- ↳ and then we die, it's more complicated than that
- ↳ powerful to think about time (the last (100.000))

LOOP

- ↳ Play on ideas by only it repeats (creating flow)
- ↳ infinite / repeat / infinite
- ↳ infinity?? Consider can the start still work if started / paused / continued from any part (of the idea??)

Creating transitions

- ↳ from one to the next - flow
- ↳ help guide / when the audience to move together from one space to another
- ↳ creates opportunities for small themes
- ↳ Liquid / liquidity
- ↳ visual journey
- ↳ discovery

Aesthetics


- ↳ language of the world around
- ↳ idea of being a sound response
- ↳ manifestation as sensory - material manifestation of my ideas / thoughts / experiences into drawings → play on when my ideas → draw the → to how I think about sound

Storyboard → gets into ideas

- ↳ storyboard → enters into an aesthetic
- ↳ projective ideas to create with motion / sound & text
- ↳ the flow / fluidity & transition
- ↳ experimental to the aesthetic is used as a tool to tease out ideas (create multiple drafts)

Appendix 2: “Sun after Rain” by Vincent Tone with a Standard License (PremiumBeat.com)

– No Longer used for the Final Animation.



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