

Moneybags
**An Intimate Introspection into
Financial Privilege**

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Abstract

This thesis consists of two components, a written exegesis as the theoretical backbone and a practical component which is a mixed media animated short film influenced by my experiences with Financial Privilege.

Through the material of the New Zealand banknote, the viewer is navigated through my upbringing – my ambitious childhood dreams, my adult realisation that my life was fundamentally easier because of monetary advantage, and the steps I have taken to become more aware of economic privilege.

This project aims to raise more awareness on this perspective by utilising an autoethnographic lens and the mediums of Visual Effects (VFX), Motion Graphics and Stop Motion.

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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.

Lucy Worsnop
15/08/2022

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Introduction

“Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.”

Henry David Thoreau (cited in Denning, 2021).

Economic freedom is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for human prosperity (Mitchell, 2013). However, when forced to acknowledge the differences in ability, luck, and educational opportunity, we can admit that we do not play on a completely level field (Ascher, 1990).

This design research project takes the position that one should be aware of their own privileges when faced with a situation of financial advantage. The final outcome of this research is an animated short film named *Moneybags*, which consists mainly of stop motion¹, motion graphics² and visual effects³ techniques. I allegorically depicted my own life timeline and what I have discovered after examining this perspective in detail. Through this research, I have discovered the importance of relatability between artist and audience. By undertaking this thesis with an autoethnographic lens, a topic as uncomfortable as financial privilege can be delivered more delicately than one without that personability.

In the technical realm, I was interested in experimenting with mixed media, including 2D and 3D animation⁴, and stop-motion animation techniques. The stylistic aesthetic of this work largely imitates the art of scrapbooking, providing a rough, handcrafted feel woven throughout the mediums selected. When trying to communicate personal messages through a visual medium, I have concluded that having easy-to-grasp concepts, as well as recognisable symbols in the work, will be received by audiences better. I have also found that having character and adding personability to the work can increase the chances of relatability. My usage of mixed media demonstrates this well, possessing the handcrafted quality that adds the uniqueness I was searching for.

¹ Stop motion is a form of animation in which an object is physically manipulated and photographed on a single frame of motion picture film, so that it appears to move on its own (Maselli, 2018). By moving the objects in very small increments they can appear to come to life on film.

² Motion graphics is “the art of combining animation and graphic design in order to convey information and communicate ideas” (Schlittler, 2015). It could be engaging and entertaining, but first and foremost it is informative (Crook & Beare, 2017).

³ Also known as *VFX*, Visual effects is “any imagery created, altered, or enhanced for a film or other moving media that cannot be accomplished during live-action shooting. In other words, much of the art of visual effects takes place in post-production, after primary image capture is complete” (Okun & Zwerman, 2010, p. 2).

⁴ 2D animation is “an illusion of movement within a two-dimensional space by sequencing individual drawings together over a set period” (Jones, 2021). A style of art based on creating a movement of objects and characters in a two-dimensional space, it caters only to the length and width of an object’s movement. Conversely, 3D animation uses three-dimensional characters and animates them within a digital environment, using computer software. Here, length, width *and* depth are considered when animating characters in 3D, which can provide a more realistic animation compared to 2D animation (Jones, 2021).

This exegesis includes five chapters:

The first chapter recounts the major personal influences that motivated me to create this project. These positions include my discovery of financial privilege, and the journey of my creative upbringing.

The second section provides a contextual review of my body of research, which guided the nature of my own project. Here I discuss the definition and the effects of financial privilege, as well as my chosen mediums and their respective psychological purposes; between each topic, I also present several works that significantly influenced my studies, theoretically or visually.

The third chapter discusses my research methodologies and methods to achieve the final artefact. Showcasing my choice of *autoethnography* as a major contributor to the format of my artefact, it also highlights the methods of *self-reflecting journaling*, *literature surveying*, *moodboards* and *iterative prototyping* to inform the design practice. A distinctive method is also explained – *intensive documentation* – which is a personal attribute of mine; together these methods streamline the autoethnographic data of my investigation and keep all creative content generated, organised and documented.

The fourth section of this exegesis is a commentary on my creative practices. This chapter focuses on what I assimilated during this stage. Included in this chapter are the importance of the narrative, new tools I discovered for preproduction and experimentation with different creative pathways.

The fifth and final chapter concludes my investigation with a reflection. It identifies variables within my investigation that could have altered the final outcome and provides alternate ideas for how my research could be implemented in the future.

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Research Question

Exploring my personal experiences with inherited wealth, how can I create a mixed media short film in order to naturalise discussion of financial privilege?

Chapter 1 | Positioning the Researcher

1.1 | Financial Privileges

My childhood is one I recall from a place of love and security. A lot was planned to support my conception; a tertiary account opened when I was born, a safe neighbourhood to grow up in, and unlimited resources to build upon my artistic passions. There is this freedom and optimism that comes naturally to me, as I have never needed to worry about how I live. Over time I have interacted with many different people from other walks of life, and during these interchanges, I have learned that life is inconsistent and unkind to others. Through this process, I have found I hold a lot of ignorance about problems I have never faced. There are levels to these notions. From small things I would take for granted in the past, such as buying groceries every week, or only learning about the concept of rent when I was a teenager. Then elements of my present-day life come into play, the habits that still occur. Activities like planning a family vacation every year, having a job only to accumulate spending money, only spending that money on inessential beauty supplies and countless dinners with friends. In the future I will still have that financial security when making adult decisions, such as buying a house.

Coupled with these revelations, I have always had a sense of *justice*⁵. As a teenager I became interested in learning about other perspectives to improve my knowledge of the world. New Zealand illustrator Toby Morris was one of the first influences on me, his comics referencing social issues like the housing crisis in *Fairer Future: Fixing Poverty in Aotearoa* (Morris, 2020) or commenting on gender inequality from the perspective of a man in *The 'War on Men'* (Morris, 2018) from his *Side Eye* series. Documentaries such as *13th* (DuVernay, 2016) provided insight into financial inequality and its ties to concepts like incarceration; concepts I have never had a personal connection to. I kept up-to-date with news articles around the world, especially during the presidency of Donald Trump and the political and social reactions during this period (Dimock & Gramlich, 2021). All of this was eye-opening, to say the least.

Many people of privilege, when recognizing how their privilege has benefitted them and harmed others, feel a sense a shame (Hoffman, 2017): a *guilt*⁶ of not understanding their benefits sooner. Younger generations especially have felt undeserving of their family's affluence because they had not earned it themselves, regardless of the circumstances of their inherited wealth (Sadek, 2020). I am one of those people, and this investigation seeks to normalize this process of shame, so more viewers can move to a state of acknowledgment and action.

⁵ Here I am referring to *social justice*, a form of moral virtue that idealises a just society where every citizen's needs can be met. It is an ideology where a set of ideas, values and social practices ensure that all persons and groups enjoy economic security (Hurlbert & Mulvale, 2020), which is the basis of my principles.

⁶ Guilt is a self-conscious emotion, a category of feelings "for which the object of reflection is one's self" (Gregory-Smith, 2012, p. 33). Guilt will appear as long as there is a feeling of obligation or liability, which explains the term *existential guilt*, when the individual can blame himself when faced with a certain social context or situation (Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995, cited in Príncipe Ferreira, 2014).

1.2 | Visual Art and Design

Art was always prevalent in my life – I do not think anyone in my life expected me to do anything else. Prior to tertiary studies, my interests were in the realm of painting and graphic design, which offered me knowledge in composition, colour theory and other design elements. I did enjoy storytelling but only believed I could accomplish it through writing.



Figure 01: Worsnop, L. *Class Act*. [Short Film]. (2020)

During my time as an undergraduate student at the Auckland University of Technology, I began the venture of using VFX and post-production techniques to evoke these stories. The short film *Class Act* (Figure 01) was a graduation project for my Bachelor of Design in Digital Design. I finished this project with flying colours and it provided technical skills to add to my portfolio like motion capture⁷ and 3D animation, but I did not enjoy doing it.

That same year, in June 2020, I created a short experimental film named *Olive* (Figure 02), which was based on my grandmother's perspective on retirement. Originally this was the main prototype for my proposal to become involved in postgraduate studies. Contrasting *Class Act*, the visuals of this short were not up to my personal standards due to the technological restraints of the Covid-19 quarantines at that time. But the sound design I crafted in this piece – the intimate interview with my grandmother's breathless voice, the wispy, haunting atmospheric sound created from reversed chords of a piano woven in to encompass her loneliness during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic lockdown – roused my interest in more personal, documentary-type films.

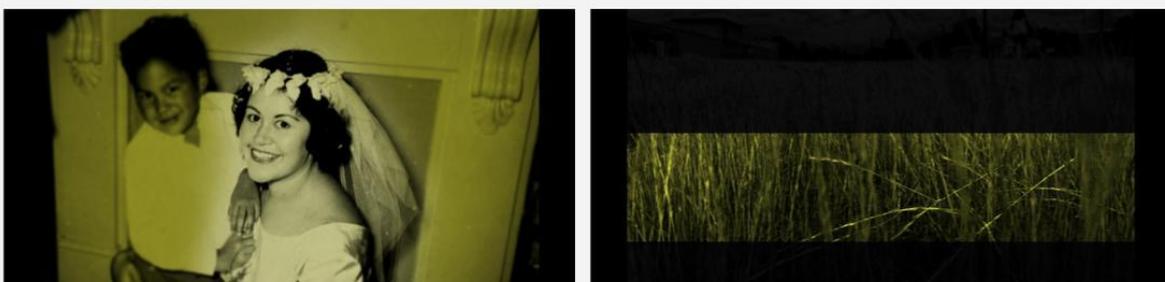


Figure 02: Worsnop, L. *Olive*. [Short Film]. (2020)

⁷ A facet of VFX, motion capture is a technology-driven method of capturing an actor's motion and physical performance, to be translated to a CGI character (Deguzman, 2021). Also known as *mocap*, it allows for photorealistic dynamics in a virtual environment (Mo-Sys, 2020) and is used in a variety of industries.

Chapter 2 | Contextual Review

Introduction

This segment analyses the major contextual influences of my thesis research. Here the sub-chapters focus on defining and discussing the concept of *financial privilege*, as well as highlighting various artefacts that discuss this. This chapter also provides several stylistic influences that informed what aesthetics and emotions I wished to envisage in *Moneybags*.

2.1 | Investigating Financial Privilege

“Social class [...] refers to an individual’s rank vis-à-vis others in society in terms of wealth, occupational prestige, and education. Abundant resources and elevated rank allow upper-class individuals increased freedom and independence, giving rise to self-focused patterns of social cognition and behavior.”

(Piff et al., 2012, p. 4086).

Since social classism is a broad subject, this project will focus on *financial privilege*, a form of differential treatment of people who have unearned, invisible advantages in the life of higher-class status – often derived from having superior financial situations (Liu, 2013). There have been other terms to describe the various effects of this phenomenon. Sadek (2020) uses the term *wealth shame* to address financial privilege in psychological studies. Here she discusses the ongoing internal torment that wealth shame brought to some of her patients due to them perceiving their achievements as nothing but a result of their affluent upbringings. I identified the term *advantage blindness* from a Harvard Business Review (Fuchs et al., 2018), where it was discussed in what ways leaders could positively respond to their privileges being addressed.

I originally wished to create this story because I wanted people to see privilege in a new light. Studies indicate the upper class may be more disposed to be unethical – greater resources, freedom, and independence than others give rise to self-focused social-cognitive tendencies (Piff et al., 2012). The realm of media often relies on this impression, making the concept of privilege the subject of villainization. The term *framing of the rich* is present in some Hollywood films, a stereotype that rich characters are predominantly portrayed as profit-hungry individuals who are only interested in money, prepared to act without moral scruples and to climb over dead bodies to get what they want (Zitelmann, 2020). There is an unlimited number of examples: I remember growing up with the scheming Mr Burns from *The Simpsons* (Groening et al., 1989 – present) and the impulsive Cruella de Vil in *101 Dalmatians* (Reitherman et al., 1961), both wealthy individuals who use money as a way to achieve their monstrous desires. Films often use money as a defining factor for transforming a good-natured person into a corrupt one, like *The Great Gatsby* (Luhmann, 2013).

Box-office successes like *Parasite* (Bong, 2019) present a wealthy family blind to the financial desperation of another. *Knives Out* (Johnson, 2019) displays the chaos of greed when an immense inheritance is given to the outsider of a prestigious family; undertones of racism are intrinsically linked to the plot, creating a larger divide between the haves and have-nots. Other media view the elite class as gluttonous tyrants who spectate violence for entertainment, like the film *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) or the South Korean television series *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021). Just like other audiences, I loathed these characters. These representations would give any viewer a relatively unfavourable attitude towards greed (Piff et al., 2012). I could not help but see a familiar pattern with all of these villains – their money trumped their empathy and conscience. Could privileged people have empathy, and can they be shown empathy in turn? That was a major question in this investigation.

Accepting and understanding my privileges has been a long journey that will never finish. The initial inspiration that sparked my sense of social justice was a simple comic named *On a plate* (2015), which was part of the comic collection *The Pencilsword*, by the New Zealand illustrator Toby Morris (*Figure 03*). He created this thought-provoking illustration that compares two children with entirely different lives based on how they grew up. It addresses financial advantages and disadvantages in a clear, concise manner to deter people from judging others based on their situations. Beginning with minor details in someone’s life, such as the difference in education, the comic builds up these elements into career-advancing opportunities for the fortunate, and tremendous drawbacks for the deprived.

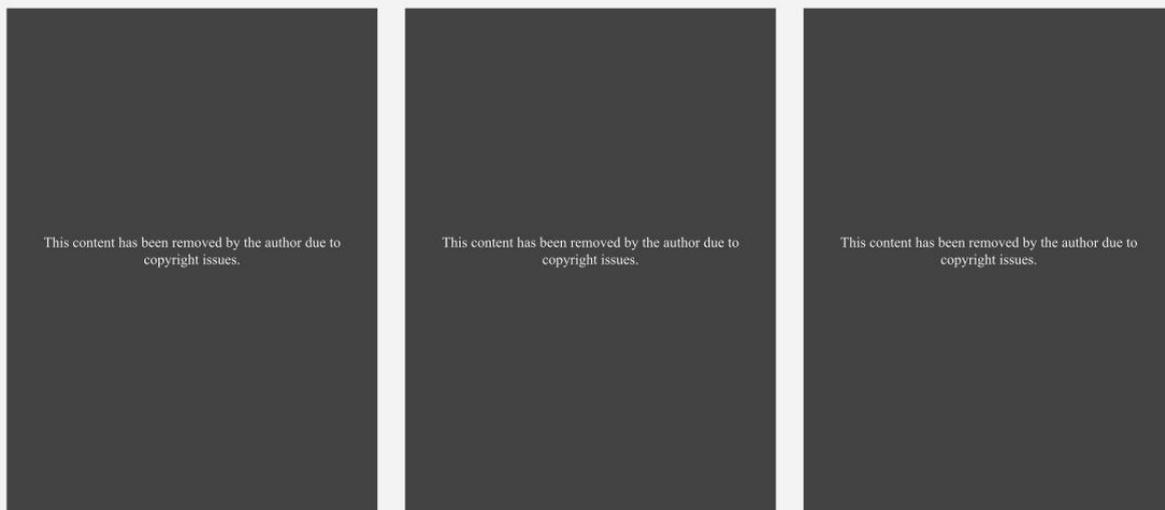


Figure 03: Morris, T. *On a plate*. [Comic Strip]. (2015)

In an interview with *Design Assembly*, Morris commented further on delivering social issues through illustration: “I didn’t start it off thinking it would be a political thing, but I try to write about things that I think are important, or scary, or confusing, or just need to be talked about, so often it ends up being quite political” (Morris, 2016). The chronological structure of this influence was the main stylistic element that continued into my processes.

The idea of comparing two fictional character's childhoods is effective for comprehending this comic, but I knew comparison would not be received well for my project; my film is based on my experiences only, and comparing my life with someone else's could be perceived as demeaning to the latter's story and a generalisation of financial disadvantage.

From then on I began my academic investigation into other endeavours to discuss privilege, specifically how those speakers effectively explained and gained an understanding of a conflicting stance. The documentary *The One Percent* (Johnson, 2006) was a good start to controversial media, documenting the relaxed lives of the titular one percent of America's wealth against the greater population, directed by Jamie Johnson – heir to a tremendous fortune. The director of another documentary discussing inherited wealth, *Born Rich* (Johnson, 2003), features a cast of other individuals born into these situations as they traverse their lives with financial advantage at a young age. More concern is brought on by the relationship with his billionaire father, who disregards his son's interests in giving the wealth gap wider attention as if it is a mere hobby. Johnson's venture to expose the power of the elite class, even though he is one of them, proves that anybody in any circumstance can grasp the issues of social inequality.

Away from America, my home country of New Zealand has its own growing problem with the wealth gap. In the context of my nation, Max Harris's *The New Zealand Project* (2017) lays out the economic disparities between the elite and the poor, and a corresponding framework to improve these discrepancies. Harris involves issues covering the typical household topics of New Zealand's housing and student loan crises but also highlights how detrimental indifference was in engaging with topics like inequality. The statement I found most alarming amongst these statistical facts was:

There were also individuals I encountered (not just young people) who were not engaged with politics, who thought it was unimportant to their lives. They had opinions – perspectives that could improve the state of the country – but they had been left behind by our political system. That felt wrong to me, because, as the election of Donald Trump later confirmed, politics matters. I wrote with them in mind, too. I hope this writing can start conversations that will make politics more appealing to them.

(Harris, 2017, p. 12).

Seeing this statement only strengthened my resolve to provide commentary on financial privilege in a New Zealand context.

2.2 | The Nostalgia of Scrapbooks and Stop Motion

The subject matter of my short film reminisces on childhood and adolescent memories – which are universal stages of life that everyone goes through – about times when I held financial privilege, which is *not* a universal feature in other lives. To compete with the latter issue, emphasizing the former became an aim. This came in the form of the sentimental and ever-common emotion of nostalgia.

The concept of nostalgia has been discussed consistently throughout time as its understanding and meanings change with each period. The present-oriented approach to nostalgia describes the feeling as “[...] a guilt feeling about the enjoyment of new surroundings, which has led one to forget his home and loved ones [...]” (Nawas & Platt, 1965, p. 52), or “a sentimental longing for the past” (Wildschut et al., 2006, cited in Phillips, 2016) and refers to a bittersweet emotion of joy tinged with sadness. It is the act of an adult remembering simpler times as a child, when stress and an overly independent personality have led them to look back at a time when there were no responsibilities in their life; nostalgia provides that valuable escape (Isbrucker, 2018). And that is where nostalgia becomes a major theme used in media, as entertainment is an escape from said stress. Nostalgia marketing serves as a popular strategy to attract consumers’ attention (Cheng & Yan, 2022) as it evokes a yearning for a rose-tinted past (Holbrook and Schindler 1991, cited in Cheng & Yan, 2022). It can leave a lasting effect on the viewer, allowing messages from that content to deeply affect that viewer over time. Because I want the contents of my messages to stick, this would be an advantage to convey in my work.

There is a need for a way to collect these souvenirs, so the emotions felt in the moment can be re-experienced hereafter. A historic method of storing memories is through scrapbooks. Often unfinished, untidied, and remains of a past left behind, scrapbooks are an intimate glimpse into one’s experiences, thoughts and personality for a limited few to see (Ott et al., 2006). These albums have not achieved *official* or authoritative status of published media like newspapers or books; rather, they tend to be personal collections of ephemera⁸ that are themselves ephemeral (Tucker et al., 2006, cited in Good, 2012). Scrapbooks provide an exemplary case of such a *genre of self* (Katriel & Farrell, 1991); they exist the majority of the time for the creator and their closest connections, then are lost to the world when those lives are no longer remembered.

Not only is the scrapbook special for its revealing qualities of a person, but it is usually crafted by the subject. The art of scrapbooking exists as a material manifestation of memory – the memory of the compiler and the memory of the cultural moment in which it was made (Ott et al., 2006). These memories are called to mind through introspection when the scrapbooker examines their creation alone (Phillips, 2016) and it becomes a self-analysis, encouraging change if stuck in a routine or in a worse state than before, for instance.

⁸ Ephemera is generally defined as collectible memorabilia that functioned for a short term purpose; they are created with their demise assumed (Ott et al., 2006). It is almost always paper-based and is often staged to be elements in scrapbooks, as remnants of one’s memories of an event (Scrapbook.com, n.d.).

It allows makers to revisit major life events, and travel back in time to when they were younger and had different connections. The majority of scrapbooks provide an opportunity to escape to simpler times, often photos based on childhood and unhurried thoughts – a perfect agency for the escapism of nostalgia to manifest within the crafter. From a standpoint applicable to my digital practices, scrapbooks could be interpreted as an analogue predecessor, making way for the 21st century and technological advancements. Social media blogs, also recognised as *digital scrapbooks* resemble traditional scrapbook production (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018), though with more efficiency and less clutter. These digital interpretations provide the same act of recounting memories, but on a screen. In fact, this thesis will act as a digital scrapbook for myself and supply me with an opportunity to relive this experience when I am older. No matter which form the scrapbook takes on, the emotion of nostalgia still lives within the ephemera one has documented, which is why the aesthetics of scrapbooking are present in my work.

There were numerous points of reference I visited for types of nostalgic media that creatives have shared with audiences. In a similar vein, the thesis film, Laura Yilmaz's *Places Other People Have Lived* (2011) employs vintage slideshow frames showcasing her family's life in their childhood home. Home videos are also a relevant feature in these types of works, as they are pre-existing, accessible pieces of moving image that diminish the emotional gap between director and audience. New Zealand film archivist Heperi Mita's *MERATA* (2018) uses personal photographs and home videos to show a different side of his mother Merata Mita – a revolutionary Māori female figure in the film industry. Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003) uses home videos as well, giving a sense of normality to a household in the midst of an investigation for child molestation; I can gather that the aim of home videos here is to look at the investigation through the lens of the innocent family members involved, as a horrid crime splits their normal lives apart. Whatever context an end product may possess, utilising personal souvenirs⁹ will immediately introduce intimacy to the visuals, allowing a deeper connection between director and viewer. In the case of my thesis, I remember our family possessing home videos – camcorder recordings of overseas trips, birthday celebrations and more. Unfortunately, I was not able to salvage any of these, as they were burned onto CDs I was not able to find. There were plenty of photographs though, all digitally stored. Experimenting with these and applying them in scenes with other media gave me a new outlet to explore the concept of nostalgia within the confines of my project.

When it comes to nostalgia within film techniques, stop motion becomes our point of focus. Stop-motion animation has existed for decades, first documented in Vitagraph Studios' film *The Humpty Dumpty Circus* (Blackton, 1908), which used toys as the subject matter for its innovative technique. Aardman Studios' characters Wallace and Gromit in *A Grand Day Out* (Park, 1989) injected the style with timeless humour for newer audiences in the 1980s and 90s, using clay as the material of their characters.

⁹ Here I am referring to objects that have personal or significant meaning in my life, such as childhood pictures or props that represent hobbies of mine. These all can reflect some of my life to audiences who don't know me, thus introducing that intimacy.

This relevance that audiences can correlate to, with such a simple material like clay coming to life, keeps viewers entertained with the many opportunities real-life objects can bring. Since 3-D animation is now easier to access with the widespread use of computer animation technology (Du, 2021) it is far more commonly seen, no longer impressive, but more a standard that is becoming harder to reach (Hosea, 2019, cited in Ruddell & Ward, 2019). To view stop motion is to watch the balance between knowing exactly how a scene is created, yet being entranced by its believability, through animated characters. It is about a painstakingly handcrafted art with such a whimsical timeless style reinvigorated for future generations to be inspired by the same films their older relatives enjoyed in their youth.

In trying to find academic references for this medium I found *The Crafty Animator* (Ruddell & Ward, 2019), a fountain of knowledge regarding handcrafted animation and stop motion. While this book discusses the use of animation in adult media (Kirkland, 2019) and the significance of handmade works in the digital age (Hosea, 2019), I focused my attention on the fifth chapter in Carla MacKinnon's *Autobiography and Authenticity in Stop-Motion Animation*. Here MacKinnon first directs our focus to the concept of authenticity¹⁰, and how mastering this value can better films attempting this approach in stop-motion animation, especially the autobiographical genre. She states that for authenticity to occur, there is a certain trust that the viewer places in the author, a trust that the author is conveying the utmost truth about their perspective. A person's claim to authenticity is linked both to how honestly their life reflects their personal origins and histories, and how clearly it expresses the pure essence of their true selves (MacKinnon, 2019, cited in Ruddell & Ward, 2019). The success of a message, therefore, is defined by how sincere the viewer sees the content, and their *emotional investment* in autobiographical work.

This value of authenticity – and trust brought on by the audience to be the most honest self you can present – is noted as essential in the stop-motion genre. The honesty prevalent in the authentic messages also appear in the hands that build the stop motion set-ups and the flawed qualities between frames. The topic of emotional investment comes full circle when looking at my own influences for this thesis; I had an emotional connection with most of the media I handpicked, rather than just a visual one. From all of my stylistic inspirations I can also gather reasons as to how I invested myself in their stories, and use these reasonings to further my own emotive presence in my film. One concern to note is the alienation between the audience and the film through digital interference. While stop-motion animation has a closer sense of physicality compared to other film genres (Ward, 2011, cited in MacKinnon, 2019), the screen does block out some of the interaction one could have. My solution to this issue is the use of hands in my film.

¹⁰ A term used as marketing language, it also represents a way of living to reflect your truest self. Within the creative industry and the makers of perceived *authentic* work, “it is often applied to artists making work that reflects the conditions of their life or history, that is perceived as emotionally sincere, or that does not seek commercial success.” (MacKinnon, 2019, cited in Ruddell & Ward, 2019, p. 100).

Audiences subconsciously pick up on details that present messages; a recurring theme of hands – especially from the top-down angle at the beginning of my work – will vaguely assume the same stance the viewer might have when executing actions in daily life. It cannot completely eliminate the digital barrier, but these small details can immerse the audience just a little more.

There were two films that I felt personally involved with within the stop-motion animation category. Due to its name, Charlie Tyrell's 2018 short documentary *My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes (Figure 04)* caught my eye when scanning stop-motion works. This piece focused on the director's relationship with his deceased father through the various artefacts the latter left in his wake. It doubles down on the personal factor of this genre, coupling the rough, handcrafted qualities of stop-motion animation with a poignant introspection into a family man who worked as a policeman, and who enjoyed fixing the house and flying planes. Even when it delves into darker topics like generational trauma, it never loses its warm-heartedness, using techniques like a witty voiceover and personal memoirs from supporting characters, to drive home Tyrell's love for his late father. Overall its intimate nature using stop-motion animation made it a favourite of mine to return to and reflect on my own relationship with my parents.



Figure 04: Tyrell, C. *My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes*. [Animated Documentary]. (2018)

The main element that captivated me in this was its use of personal memorabilia to depict the life of a deceased person. While my thesis is about myself, I can still take household artefacts related to my passions and personality, and showcase them to wider audiences. In the stop-motion animation segments of my work, I have incorporated articles that are both associated with me and my wealth, such as my wallet and my piggy bank, as well as extra items that documented my loving and supported childhood. This included my passport, well-used paintbrushes, and other aspects that reflect my identity. On top of the use of memorabilia, the film's voiceover format stuck with me. It added an extra layer of personality to Tyrell's film, and I believed it would do mine as well.

The second work I took inspiration from was personal – a 2020 AUT student film produced by two friends of mine, *Miro Wine* (Greally & Martin-Babin, 2021) (*Figure 05*). The juncture between tradition and digital was crossed in this film by Briana Greally and Lily Martin-Babin, depicting the unlikely friendship between two of New Zealand's native birds – a kererū and a pīwakawaka.

Witnessing the creation of their handcrafted film I picked up on small techniques they would use to make their computer-generated images more lifelike, such as creating displacement maps with fingerprints to depict modelled clay or animating their birds at 12 frames per second to roughen the normally smooth 3-D animation. Observing their success with endearing, homespun characters made entirely of CGI processes firsthand, ultimately improved my confidence in my abilities with stop motion.



Figure 05: Greally, B. & Martin-Babin, L. *Miro Wine*. [Animated Short]. (2020)

Stop motion was a large part of my final artefact, though this was mainly through live-action shots. I did several experiments within a digital environment; unfortunately, none of my CGI stop-motion animated scenes (*Figure 06*) were used in the final version of this thesis, but it was a procedure I learned valuable skills from. Additionally, I started with the CGI environments first, so I learnt several techniques involving stop motion before transitioning to making stop-motion animation in real life.

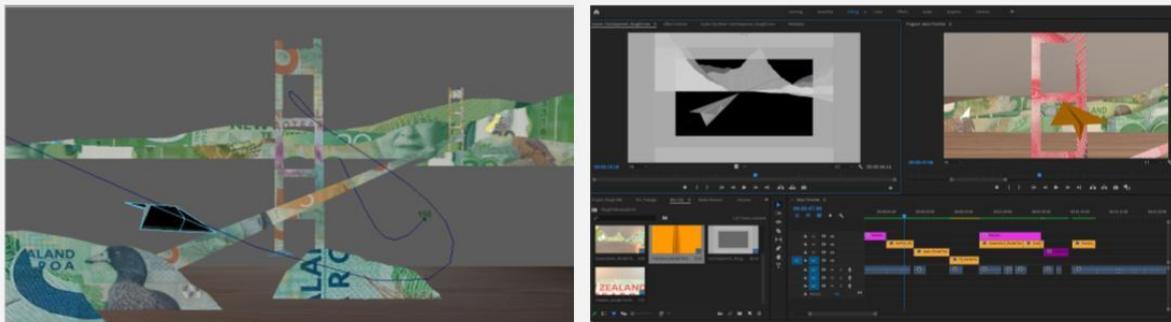


Figure 06: Worsnop, L. *Creating CGI stop motion environments*. [Screenshot]. (2022)

2.3 | Examining the Beauty and History of Currency Design

The concept of money has been part of human history for at least 3,000 years, a means to accelerate the speed of business transactions (Krishnan, 2018). While it began as a humble system to replace the tediousness of bartering, it has become a symbol of a country, being a place where it could celebrate its heroes, its history and its significant achievements (Boyd, 2020). I have harboured a fascination for currency design since childhood. The consideration of details, textures, materials and symbols united to exhibit patriotism and pride for a nation through its currency was beneficial to my work, as it provided ample material to interact with in my experimentation. Interacting with the New Zealand currency design in particular – with its almost luminous colouration, fine line detail and layered composition – invigorated my interest in the material. Pairing this aspiration with another goal of seeing this research through a New Zealand lens to hone in on the character factor of *Moneybags* – I decided to bring this fascination to the moving image.

One of the most important factors for including this material was understanding the requirements to use banknotes without infringing copyright laws. New Zealand Reserve Bank regulations state that “Reproduction of complete, scaled, one-sided images of notes and coins, in books, brochures or on-screen typically for educational, informational or illustrative purposes [...]” (Reserve Bank of New Zealand, 2015) is acceptable. Furthermore, there are additional comments for artists or photographers including banknotes or coins in a larger picture or photograph, even in animated form, for artistic or advertorial purposes, defining this use as appropriate when complying with the previous rule and incidental to the main subject of the picture (Reserve Bank of New Zealand, 2015).

From researching moving image projects that involve this unique art form, I gained insight into stop-motion animation through the shorts and commercial work of American director PES. I first found him when surveying money-related moving image works, and his 2005 commercial *Coinstar* (Figure 07) – for the company bearing the same name – hit the intersection between coinage and character perfectly. His experimentation in using coins to visualise the idiom *loose change* inspired me to try this type of work. I began my stop motion experimentation by imitating this sequence, which convinced me to use coins more. After restructuring and tightening my script, this concept of travelling money was expanded to become the defining stop-motion animation in my short film. I animated both coins and paper banknotes in this style: the coins coming to life from a makeshift piggy bank at the start, and the banknotes crawling out of household objects, to signify my abundance of inherited wealth. This became a significant inspiration for the final outcome.

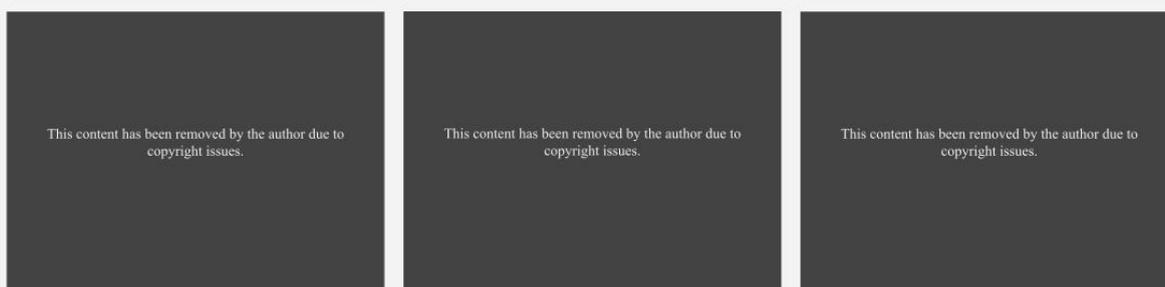


Figure 07: PES. *Coinstar*. [Commercial]. (2005)

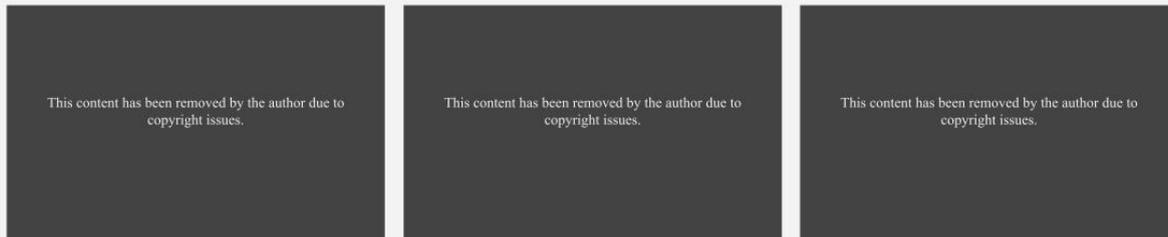


Figure 08: Turczan, L. *Money Is The One True God*. [Music Video]. (2021)

There were two other films I discovered which used money, specifically the paper kind; firstly, Los Angeles-based director Lachlan Turczan's 2021 music video *Money Is The One True God* (Figure 08). In Turczan's visuals to songwriter Blake Mills's titular song, its subject matter lies in thousands of shots from numerous international banknotes. The outcome is hypnotic – the minuscule details of each dollar bill are crisp and showcase the creativity – as the camera spins dazedly with the patterns. Mills's soft-spoken voice and lyrics lend themselves well to the various cultural and religious symbols alike, taking us on a deep-meaning journey with the visuals presented.

The second piece comes in the form of Corrie Francis Parks's 2019 animation *Foreign Exchange* (Figure 09). Unlike Turczan's disorienting close-ups, Parks uses the subject matter at face value, the texture and wear-and-tear of the paper currency adding textural interest. Not only that, but she also implements sand, combining the rough quality of the substance with the roughness of stop-motion animation. The personification of both the banknotes and grains of sand interweave as the animation mimics animals, nature and other societies around the world by cutting out the imagery on the currency. The most important feature I gathered from this influence was the realism of the money; the detail that came with each asset and how the cutouts looked as though they were layered against each other, made the animation much more pleasing to the eye. The depth between every cutout added realism to an otherwise whimsical visual sequence.

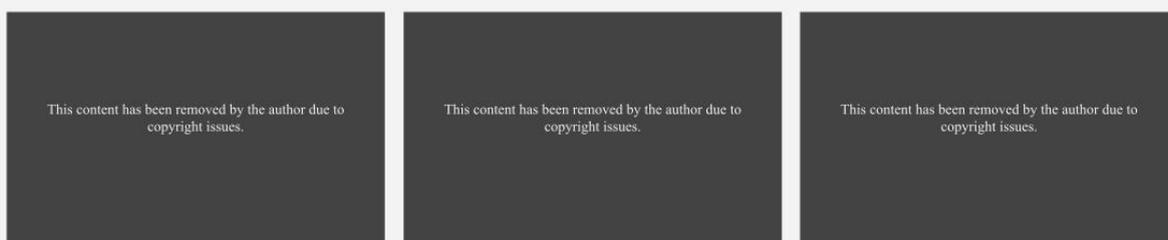


Figure 09: Francis Parks, C. *Foreign Exchange*. [Animated Short]. (2019)

No matter which one is your preference, each provided examples of how paper currency could be used in conjunction with animation and VFX. It helped me realise I could use the banknote for more than just face value, that they could be picked apart to utilise the most intricate of details.

2.4 | A Relationship between Semiotics and Motion Graphics

Semiotics is a broad, diverse field that involves the study of multiple kinds of signs conveyed via varied channels and media, made of socially organised and evolutionarily-generated sign systems (Prior, 2014). In simpler terms, it is the research pertaining to symbols, as assets that is understood as representing an idea, object, or relationship. To use one concept of my thesis as an example, semiotics incorporates the theme of money, which I explain to be representative of freedom in the 21st century; by possessing more wealth, one gains access to more opportunities in stages of life such as education and career, than without.

This area of study has several paths that can be used in conjunction; the first is understanding the symbols by themselves. There there is the act of interpreting semiotics in the analysis of literary and cultural texts, seeking ways to read objects in texts or to trace the role of language in mediating systems of objects and actions. An example is seeing fashion as not only clothes, but also ways of talking, writing, and imaging clothes (Prior, 2014). From these examinations, an exploration of cultural or societal assumptions can be made in relation to the work examined. To give a more in-depth example of what is defined here, French essayist Roland Barthes makes an excellent analysis of a simple advertisement from the French brand *Panzani* in *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977), especially since this essay was a first for using semiotics in the visual communication industry. Here, Barthes takes very small details (which he terms *signs*) that the general viewer would not take into account, and fleshes out the reasoning for these features.

“We never encounter [...] a literal image in a pure state. Even if a totally ‘naive’ image were to be achieved, it would immediately join the sign of naivety and be completed by a third - symbolic - message.”

(Barthes, 1977, p. 157).

Plenty of these features reflect the intention: to make Italian cuisine. Barthes initially points to the text promoted in the poster, the brand’s name *Panzani*, which linguistically sounds more Italian, therefore encouraging audiences to believe it is Italian by association. The colour palette is also addressed, an earthy warm tone throughout the picture that draws upon the Italian influence of the product. Even the most minuscule of details, like the fact the packaging is open, can represent the freshness of the food. The subject matter is assembled in a haphazard fashion as if the camera just so happens upon the spontaneous display. Qualities of this style of presentation include informality and togetherness, an image of domesticity, which also aligns with a cliched view of Italian culture. It is important to note that these features are manufactured for the target audience rather than the actual origin – the *Italian* products are from the *French* brand *Panzani*, so the company provides tourist stereotypes that mimic the *idea* of what Italian food – and by extension, its culture – is like. Through advertisements such as this, we can gather that all stylistic fundamentals of visual design will have a meaning, whether we choose this or not.

By analysing this simple poster with Barthes, I have discovered just how much detail means to the average viewer, unconsciously. While I understood the importance of basic design elements like colour and composition, I did not discern how important every detail is – how I position the subject matter or what accompanies my childhood photographs may indicate the love and effort put into this film. It also gave me food for thought outside what Barthes discussed. Even though Barthes' analysis was based on a still image, I have transitioned the lessons of this study to the moving image. Through this influence, I started to consider the timing of certain shots, and the weight this might bring as if I unconsciously want to give viewers time to reminisce on their experiences. With the top-down angle of my introductory shots, audiences might believe I want them to think that they are in my position, with my hands acting as theirs. It subconsciously implanted messages in their heads that proved useful in gaining the genuineness I was looking for.

I also did not realise how crucial linguistics¹¹ is in art; but semiotics does. For knowledge on all things text-image related, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993), was a go-to. Not only was it a visual feast for the eyes, but the topics explained were broken down into casual, simple language for any reader to learn from. In his second and sixth chapters, McCloud divides the humble medium of the comic strip into two basic elements – pictures and words. Aside from techniques used to communicate action, time and space, pictures and words work in harmony to create a singular act, one that is both facile to understand the meaning of and to please the eyes. Traditionally pictures are received information, as one can acknowledge the meaning without education or prior knowledge, while writing is perceived, as one needs to understand the language it is written in to decode the messages (McCloud, 1993). They lie on two sides of the same coin, however with more abstraction, pictures lose their directness and text becomes increasingly easier to read when shorter and bolder.

When it comes to my project, the voiceover script carries a lot of the delivery of the film's content. The goal of the visuals becomes a supplement to the audio, but that does not mean they cannot work alongside the audio. From McCloud's reflection on this relationship between pictures and words, I have gathered that the stylistic elements of both should intertwine instead of just working together in harmony. They can move as parallels of each other, providing additional information that the other does not bring. In one scene of *Moneybags* I have icons that represent future privileges I may get because of my upbringing, like a checklist and keys to a house. Alone, these drawings do not give the bigger picture, but I can introduce text to complete the meaning of the image. Words and pictures can also lend their advantages to one another. A word can benefit from the directness of pictures, borrowing the stylisation of pictures to gain emotion purely from the visual. In *Moneybags* the text written in my film visualises my energy when discussing my experiences.

¹¹ Linguistics is the scientific study of human language, how it is structured and how it functions. Language is a system of vocal signs with an internal structure, used for the purposes of human communication, and usually has a secondary function of carrying a social message (Hickey, n.d.).

In some instances the animated, wobbly text is handwritten into the film like diary entries, flickering to indicate uncertainty. In other scenes the words are bold, direct and unwavering, representing my confidence in my answers. Likewise, pictures can become more sophisticated, requiring more perception on the audiences' behalf and a *reading-between-the-lines* approach to understanding them. Sometimes it is better if some scenes are left up for interpretation by the viewer – they may interpret a picture differently, therefore taking my experience and repositioning it closer to their point of view. Some of the scenes I visualise represent these more complex topics in my project that cannot be represented by one image, like financial security and guilt. Other graphics need to be simplified for audiences to get from point A to point B, due to time constraints between sentences or because I do not want to leave space for thought; utilising a mix of abstraction and simplification maintains a dynamic flow within the film. By taking McCloud's guidance, infusing the highlights of both elements and combining them together, I can create the most emotive content for my film.

“Motion pictures employ a complex fusion of speech, music/noises, written language, and visual imagery whose articulation has implications for other types of visual semiosis.”

(Betancourt, 2022, p. 14).

Motion graphics is my other primary design technique apart from stop motion. As explained in the introduction, motion graphics differs from VFX in that the primary goal is not integrated believability, but visual communication. It is *in* the world of the footage, but not part of it (Crook & Beare, 2017). The emergence of motion graphics as a commercial field happened gradually; the transition from live broadcasts to filmed programmes led to innovative solutions to the difficulties of television and film design (Betancourt, 2013). Revolutionary figures of this medium began in various design practices, though the experimental film genre especially influenced generations of animators and graphic designers. Frenchman Marcel Duchamp was a precursory figure leading the experimental charge. Saul Bass is also well-known, primarily for his simple geometric shapes, bright backgrounds and use of symbolism. Within the New Zealand context is Len Lye, who supplied the world with surreal experimental animated shorts – such as *A Colour Box* (1935), made with a variety of art supplies on 16mm film stock. Lye was a precursory figure of motion graphics before it became commercial; *A Colour Box* was an experimental short that “developed the combination of live and animated elements, as well as the orchestration of color in a laborious production process” (Betancourt, 2011). With technology becoming increasingly easier to use and to reach for when in need of entertainment, the chance of addressing global viewers makes motion graphics a much more attractive design to use.

As such, motion graphics and semiotics share a close relationship, being that these themes are concerned with communicating messages and require *perception* from audiences to understand the message being communicated (Betancourt, 2022). Financial privilege occurs throughout the world in a vast number of circumstances, where symbols become the sole link between my work and their life. Because international audiences may not speak the same language, the diagrammatic pictures offered by motion graphics are the solution to this issue. The best strategy was to use recognisable symbols that audiences could relate to quicker. Whether that be creating literal icons to represent phrases in my voiceover, like drawing groceries and luggage, or more abstract ideas like handcuffs made of money to represent the guilt of having financial privilege. Motion graphics becomes the bridge through which I can relate to possible international audiences and showcase my story; motion graphics is the easiest medium to translate this.

However, a point needs to be made about text in the world of motion graphics. Just like in semiotics, written language is a prevalent element in the world of motion graphics. Typography is the art of arranging letters and text in a way that makes the copy legible, clear, and visually appealing to the reader (Hannah, 2022). As discussed in McCloud's analysis, words are a crucial design and the most direct way of delivering messages. While motion graphics are set up to convey points through visuals alone, typography gives a helping hand when explanation goes beyond simple pictures. The fourth chapter in David Crow's *Visible Signs* (2010) revisits Barthes' early identification of linguistic devices in design. Unlike symbols that may be perceived differently by each viewer, words are a method of directly confronting a subject, allowing an easier connection – it is only a matter of understanding the written language. From Barthes' perspective, text on an image constitutes what he calls a *parasitic message*, designed to quicken the reading with additional signifieds (Crow, 2010).

Here in Crow's compilation of text analyses, we find numerous purposes for text presented in a visual work; from adding new information to an otherwise puzzling design, tying a personal identity to a piece, giving a medium a fresh outlook, or even changing the meaning of a subject altogether. Crow's analysis of linguistic usage in supplying a picture with deeper meaning gave me alternate ideas for using text in my project. Terminology like financial privilege is not an easy picture to convey. Overriding the confusion that comes with just visual interpretation – defining what financial privilege means to me, or having singular words to communicate an emotion like *guilt* – are on the top of the agenda. Along with including supplementary direction to a scene, words can add more visual interest. Li Yu's thesis on typography specifically in title sequences, *Typography in film title sequence design* (2008), introduced me to the term *kinetic typography*. Also known as *dynamic typography* or *time-based typography*, it is the art that deals with type that moves (Yu, 2008). It allows creators to take attributes of movement found in typical animation and moving image – of the emotive appeal these can convey to audiences – into the humble alphabet, which leads to my determination in using kinetic type.

In *Moneybags*, the majority of type used is my own handwriting – the imperfections of this already display the handcrafted quality I am looking to envisage in the rest of the visuals. Animating this gives birth to a wide range of effects. For example, I can make it look as though I am writing directly on screen, indicating these sections are thoughts made in the present moment. I can erase or cross out words to stipulate I may have changed my mind about an opinion, or have blurred out sentences to show my unconscious thoughts on a conflicting subject matter. These effects will provide more complexity to my words, to represent the amount of thought I have put into the script and my journey with financial privilege.

Conclusion

This chapter has allowed me to broaden my horizons of the content I produced in this thesis. Through this process, I now have comprehensive research surrounding the topic of financial privilege and its many viewpoints, the emotive purpose of nostalgia using handcrafted procedures like scrapbooking and stop motion and existing use of currency design in moving image. I also have a newfound appreciation for the parallel of pictures and words, which make up the basis of my moving image work. Uncovering the detail of this relationship, in conjunction with my chosen mediums including motion graphics, has improved my skill in using this universal language.

Chapter 3 | Research Design

Introduction

To gather, analyse, and then visualise content as elaborate as this investigation takes a combination of several phases. With contextual areas as diverse as financial privilege, it was essential to create a specific lens to avoid overused approaches to such a broad context. Considering my original motivations for this project were to inspire people to delve into a self-reflective journey as I have done, it only seemed fitting to position the artefact from a personal standpoint; autoethnography quickly became the framework with which I shaped the substance of the thesis.

Methods like *self-reflective journaling*, *literature surveying* and *case studies* hone in on both my experiences and similar circumstances from other walks of life besides my own. Moodboards are the primary tool for collecting stylistic inspiration to adapt my anecdotes into a lively, aesthetically pleasing infographic. *Iterative prototyping* rounds out the conventional methods as a way of experimenting with various materials, concepts and narrative devices for the end product. *Intensive documentation* is a key process to my identity and body of work; in this thesis, it is mainly used as a way of keeping track of progress. The methodology and subsequent methods in question will be better defined and explained in relation to the project in the sub-headings preceding this introduction.

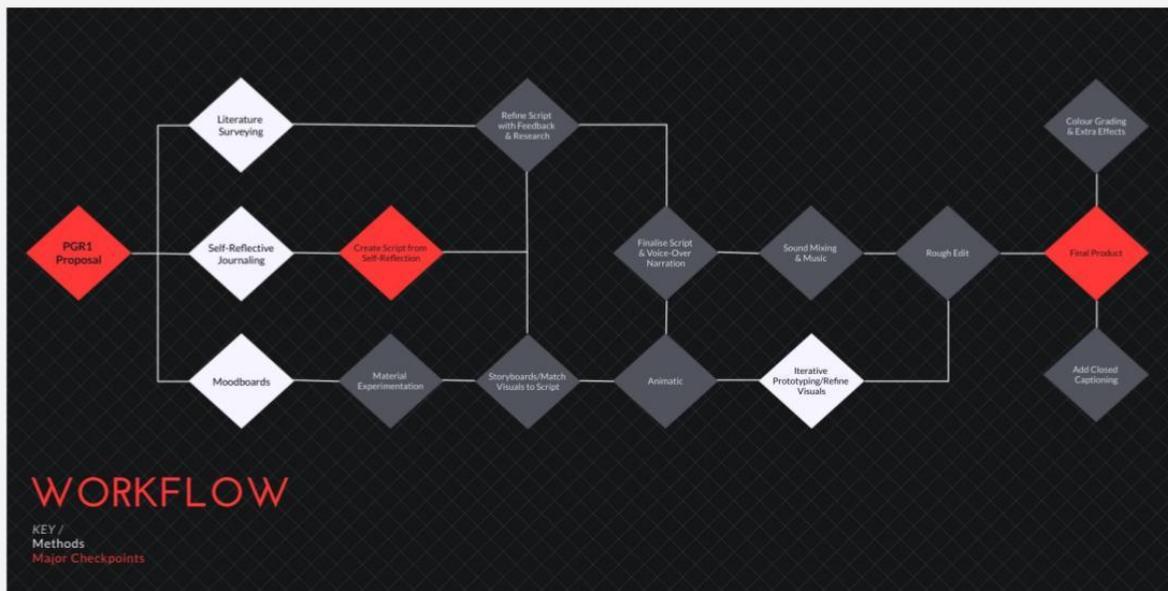


Figure 10: Worsnop, L. *Early Concept of Methods Workflow*. [Screenshot]. (2021)

3.1 | Methodology

Autoethnography

Autoethnography gives voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding (Wall, 2008). As qualitative research, it is a lens that attempts to recentre the researcher's experience as vital in and to the research process (Poulos, 2021) and provides support that the researcher's argument for the study is worth acknowledging – whether that reasoning is personal or otherwise. Autoethnography often involves the writer or researcher in crafting creative narratives shaped out of personal experiences within a culture and addressed to varied audiences (Poulos, 2021). It is not all within the maker however, as an autoethnographer needs to recognise the differences in their experiences compared to other people (Ellis et al., 2011). While one can focus on recreating their stories, they need to relate to characteristics that are linked to wider societal circles.

The goal is to *relate* to the viewers witnessing your creative journey. The concept of relatability entails the degree of relatedness on whether knowledge gained from one context is relevant to other contexts (Dzakiria, 2012). Relatability has several advantages in creative works, allowing audiences to celebrate representation through characters and storylines for topics that are underrepresented (Straube, 2021) and allowing viewers to take on a *surrogate* relationship with a creator's story to truly immerse themselves in that perspective (Amlani et al., 2016; Sole & Wilson, 2002). In addition to the theoretical research gathered here, this methodology has also been prevalent in several of my stylistic influences, like some of the short films mentioned in the previous chapter. *My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes* (Tyrell, 2018) gives a glimpse into losing an important loved one, and how one artist remembered them. *Places Other People Have Lived* (Yilmaz, 2011) takes this memorial and dedicates its product to a childhood home, a place that carries an abundance of familial flashbacks.

In the case of the thesis, my life and experiences as someone born into a situation of financial advantage become the centrepiece of the research. The aim of this film is to heighten human knowledge from this perspective, and by taking a reflexive stance, my project provides a reasoned position in the complexity of the class system. Through the methods explained below, I reform these autoethnographic findings into a narrative structure. This is completed with symbolic visuals that are showcased through mediums that are a direct product of the content discussed.

3.2 | Methods

Self-Reflective Journaling

“Reflection is a purposeful activity in which you analyse experiences, or your own practice/skills/responses, in order to learn and improve.”

(University of Birmingham Library Services, 2015).

As a branch of autoethnography, journaling presented itself at the beginning of my investigation as a way of compiling my experiences with financial privilege. In turn, it helped me find a platform to springboard my project. Research shows that it is also used in similar situations to mine, that being within tertiary education: “Used as a metacognitive practice, audio reflection offers opportunities for more nuanced accounts of learning, a less intimidating place to experiment with new vocabulary and skills, and space for student voice unencumbered by textual errors” (LeVan & King, 2018, p. 4). The main advantage of utilising journaling is its access, as the concepts and developments come from the artist and are available in every step of the proceeding. An obvious drawback to this method are the biases and opinions conveyed, which will be critiqued by audiences in the final artefact. I never intended for this project to be a pleasing one; it is merely a reflection of my conscience.

Because I was the central participant in my examination, defining my unconscious biases and seeing where I could change, shaped the narrative structure of *Moneybags*. While I began by writing my observations, I found that these reflections were better recorded by speaking into a voice recorder, to ensure that I could discuss experiences without distraction. A large portion of my self-reflective writings were anecdotes from the past, specifically observations I made as a child. I always noticed that friends’ houses were smaller than my own, or that some friends never had money to go shopping. In more recent times, my adult friends often complain about their looming student debt and impending rents while I stay suspiciously quiet. While I label my guilt during this investigation, it has always been there, this idea of not deserving what I have been born with when there are others who have had it harder. These small details have accumulated over time; the self-reflecting journaling process is very meditative – to unload those thoughts and put them to good use in my thesis research.

Literature Surveying and Case Studies

To comprehend the contextual areas beyond my perspective, I have researched similar perspectives and projects by surveying the literature, a key component of the research process. Also known as a *literature review*, these terms are somewhat misleading, as they cover a broad range of media apart from books. Literature reviews “demonstrate to readers that the author has a firm understanding of the topic. This provides credibility to the author and integrity to the work’s overall argument” (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012, p. 2).

The contextual side of this method locates existing procedures that use economic advantages for social good. The contextual review chapter of my exegesis highlights the best of my research, but I have uncovered a vast range of work from many different industries and voices. My literature surveying has taken me on a journey to find a suitable foundation to work with my autoethnographic experiences. I found that the concept of financial privilege is interwoven in a number of contexts. For a good fragment of the coursework I was involved in discussing philanthropy and possible philanthropic candidates, since this has a direct tie to financial privilege. I explored the ethics of wealth and why philanthropy has increased in the 21st century (Driscoll & Grant, 2009) and become a trend in companies to promote a *pure* image for the corporation (Olson et al., 2016). Even though I have not analysed these contexts deeply in this final written work, they provided extra substance, opinions and layers that I have taken into consideration in my film.

From here I have tightened the information into a structure that positions my topic in a positive light, to use in both the written exegesis and anecdotal narration for my infographic film. By presenting this project in a playful, uninhibited yet palatable manner, the opinions introduced can be softened by the optimistic and uplifting tone of the short film. Speaking genuinely from a place of experience, as well as connecting to said shared human experiences and values, are the key concepts upon which the film’s narrative is constructed.

Moodboards

The aesthetic aspect of the project is undertaken using moodboards to find a visually attractive and engaging approach for my research, as informative content such as mine is often considered boring and unappealing to watch. A similar visual concept to the realm of scrapbooks, these provide points of reference to an idea. In the offline world, moodboards usually have a scrapbook look and are collected using magazine copies and glue and scissors (Stockleben et al., 2016). Yet in a thesis with features in constant motion, I also believe that building a collage of moving image sequences is essential.

To specify the method for my project's design, I aimed to use both a moving image showreel of sequences, as well as the typical collage of images that inspired the practical outcome of *Moneybags*. There are certain features of influential content that would be understood better using the latter format, including transitions between shots or the movement of cameras, that are better studied in movement. To prevent wasting time and becoming bored within the digital realm, I have a main inspiration pool after gathering a diverse range of design influences, with circles of relative influences to orbit the core sources. They have been catalogued meticulously with explanations attached to help me recognise why they were obtained in the first place.

When the banknote concept became a primary material of my project, the moodboard became a repository to store scans, different iterations of the New Zealand currency in history and emulations that I have trialled. Plagiarism is a major risk to any practical or design-based research, so the aim here is to pull only minor stylistic features from inspiration rather than an entire concept. It's a valuable asset that will be used time and time again, especially in the workplace of future work opportunities of mine.

Iterative Prototyping

A design method based on a cyclic process of prototyping, testing, analysing, and refining a product or process, iterative prototyping helps designers refine their ideas and discover previously unknown issues and opportunities (Dow et al., 2009). In part, it is also the gradual improvement of ideas and products over time, cyclically and based on feedback from peers and instructors (McDaniel & Telep, 2021). Based on the results of testing the most recent iteration of a design, changes and refinements can be made to gain the most potential from each round of ideas.

Once a narrative premise was conceived, the following stages involved iterative prototyping to achieve the most purposeful, efficient project. These steps possess the typical phases of any moving image production, including storyboards and animatics in the final concept of the film, to flesh out the cinematography and movement of shots. This method informs all attempts at progress in my thesis, from narrative tests to material exploration. Utilising iterative prototyping has prevented me from focusing too much time on one detail, and in turn, improved my multitasking capabilities. Mistakes are caught early in the process, streamlining the cycle with each round, as seen in the iterations below (Figure 11).

Interactive prototyping became very useful when using mixed media. I found one of my bad habits in assembling *Moneybags* was separating my mediums into distinct segments, when in actuality they should unite together seamlessly. Adding more details per iteration was how I solved this issue; I started with the biggest segments and the ‘base’ medium of these segments. I refined the shots by generating ideas; how I could include one material into the background of another, and how I could fill in a space between two existing shots. Overall, stepping back and integrating details per iteration helped me build a secure framework for the final artefact.



Figure 11: Worsnop, L. *Iterations of a Final Composition*. [Screenshot]. (2022)

Intensive Documentation

Though not a typical research-backed method, this process is a unique trait of mine and essential to how I run my operations. In research within education contexts, organisation is shown to be a prerequisite for success – across all studies into higher education and all life situations (Gambill et al., 2008). This was something taught to me mainly by my parents. Unfortunately, it was never taught within my school experience, and the fear I would end up struggling with simple tasks due to disorganisation is what led me to sharpen my organisational abilities. In my undergraduate degree, I cultivated this style of presentation to display my work findings and consistent efforts in semester-long projects. Coupled with the course requirement to give a small reflection and some images each week, I elevated the importance of this paper requirement because I wanted to keep a record of my achievements and motivate myself further, especially when stress was at an all-time high.

In this thesis, my work is presented on a Google Slides document (*Figure 12*), predominantly in two-week chapters at a time. This is then given to my supervisors as a reflection of what I have achieved in the time period between our fortnightly supervision meetings; this was especially vital during the Lockdown period of my programme when contact was scarce. I also have a separate document that chronicles all my major stylistic influences, where I bullet-point the features that inspired *Moneybags*. Everything is catalogued precisely to avoid loss of documentation for the final written portion of this assignment. It makes finding research much simpler. I was introduced to Zotero for the reference portion of my research, another tool that I will keep using in the future. On top of this, all post-production files – from sketches, and 3D assets to final renders – are strictly organised for the most efficient pathways.



Figure 12: Worsnop, L. *Documentation of creative practices & stylistic influences*. [Screenshot]. (2021)

Conclusion

These aforementioned methods all come together to form an evaluative yet unbiased domain to acknowledge my given privileges. By incorporating the autoethnographic methodology specifically, I can build a believable narrative pulled from my experiences with financial privilege, for the basis of my project.

Chapter 4 | Critical Commentary

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the creation of *Moneybags*. To fully immerse readers in my practice, screenshots were taken throughout the entire coursework period. Gathering these images early in the process and documenting each step thoroughly made my journey much easier to manage in the long run.

4.1 | Narrative Exploration

To launch the content of the project, I started with finding the right approach to voice my perspective on privilege. No matter how much research I amassed in this investigation, it will never compare to actually experiencing the disadvantages first-hand. Because of this, I have chosen to take the position of an optimistic and casual point of view, to recognise my knowledge as being limited to purely the angle of privilege. I wrote the script from a first-person perspective, as these are events that I participated in firsthand. It could have been an interesting avenue to write it in second-person perspective, to bring readers into a scene and actively witness an experience with the author (Ellis et al., 2011) but I find it much easier to write in first-person.

The use of a voice-over was a definite decision from the beginning of the project. Voice-overs provide additional information, such as a mood or attitude, by stressing certain words or the change of the speaker's voice (Yu, 2008). My characterisations of sentence structures or intonations of syllables would add personality to a personal script, and the intentions of my content could be carried through properly to the final edit.

“Making cinema automatically implies that someone needs to view the narrative. The main objective of filmmaking is to construct a narrative so that an audience may appreciate it.”

(Carmona, 2017, p. 10).

I did not intend to create a narrative-focused film at first. With this type of content, I originally believed a documentary-style format, based on real-life accounts and only using visuals to explain the terminology, was the best way to introduce financial privilege. What I have found from this concern – and my attempts at creating a film devoid of any plot altogether – is that every scenario requires narrative elements, even if the media has no conventional storyline. In order for an audience to receive a message, it needs to have a narrative, a sum of events that must be organised into a sequence (Metz, 1991, cited in Carmona, 2017), otherwise it ceases to translate an idea across. Narrative seems to appear in almost all human discourse as a means for both knowing, acquiring and organising information, and telling and communicating information to others (Carmona, 2017). For a short film like *Moneybags*, components like recurring visuals and themes are essential to keeping a story concise and motivated, and an ending resolute.

The first notable attempt at a personable voice-over type film was a small animatic I created discussing student loans and my lack of one. This was a significant breakthrough when considering a format for my film – it was the first time I added more emotion and character into a voiceover script, as my previous animatics were just stating facts and logic. This attempt cemented itself as the framework for the final format.

4.2 | Material Exploration

Compared to the strong vision of what themes I wished to discuss, the visual elements of the project were up for experimentation. The initial requirements I had for the graphics were that they displayed a range of skills I had assembled during my time at university, and they presented the information of my voice-over correctly. This way audiences would be encouraged to listen to what I had to say. Due to my project being about wealth, it was fitting from the start to introduce currency as a material. I have tried a variety of interpretations to find a use for the currency material. I have recreated these details and textures using traditional media like watercolours and ink pens (*Figure 13*).

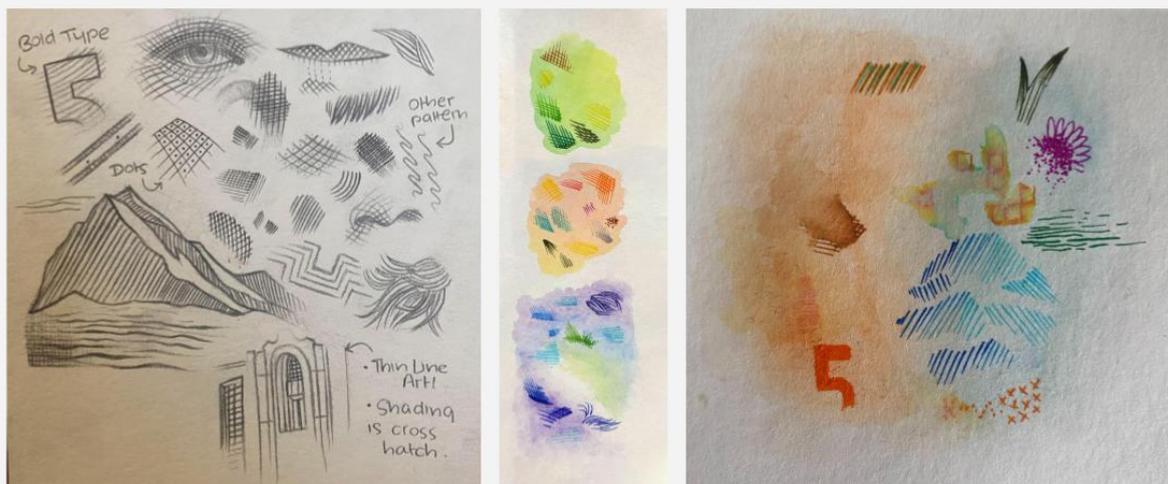


Figure 13: Worsnop, L. *Banknote texture field notes*. [Screenshot]. (2022)

I have had difficulty scanning and transferring these assets to the digital realm for the motion graphics segment; instead, I implemented the field notes presented above into digital practice and repeated these exercises on illustration software. I made small 2D animations that imagined New Zealand landscapes made of money, and entirely on digital software.

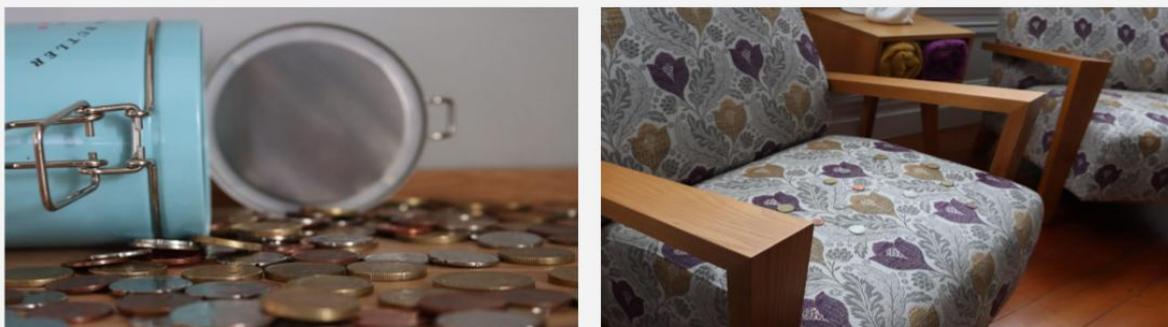


Figure 14: Worsnop, L. *Stop motion tests*. [Screenshot]. (2021)

My discovery of the *Coinstar* (PES, 2005) commercial led me to experiment with a lot of stop motion; initially using make-up products I had on hand, I decided to use the coin collection I have been amassing from my part-time hospitality job (*Figure 14*).

These coin tests were successful, as the coins provided neat movements and interesting opportunities for transitions – an essential for a motion graphics sequence. These advantages cemented their usage in my final artefact. One production element I initially underestimated was a controlled lighting environment. My first tests were rife with dramatic lighting changes between frames because of the camera’s automatic white balance detecting different lighting. The shots also had quite dark shadows, for example when my hands would come into frame. Both of these would be a major distraction for the viewer if I left them untreated, and it would be very time-consuming to adjust every frame manually. In order to produce the best possible stop motion, it is imperative to have a lighting setup.

Two lights are loaned out for this shoot, one acting as a key light¹² and the other a fill light¹³ (Figure 15). To balance the temperatures I have the key light in a neutral white temperature range, while the fill supplies a warmer, more orange tone. Natural daylight also provides some additional brightness. In the original filming location for the top-down shots – my bedroom desk – the natural daylight didn’t come through well. To alleviate this problem, my final stop-motion animations were all done in areas of my house which naturally have access to daylight. Controlling what light was illuminating the subject matter provided much better continuity for my production.



Figure 15: Worsnop, L. *Filming set-up*. [Screenshot]. (2022)

¹² Jeremy Birn, lighting technical director at Pixar Animation Studios and author of *Digital Lighting & Rendering* (2000), described the key light as “the subject’s main illumination and defines the dominant angle of the lighting” (Birn, 2000, p. 38). It is often the brightest light source, therefore it would cast the most shadows.

¹³ In comparison to the key light, the fill light provides extra lighting to the subject matter. It can also simulate the effect of reflected light, soften the harshness from just having one light and assist in preventing the shadows of the key light (Birn, 2000).

I also wanted to use paper money in the stop motion format. I experimented with manipulating the banknotes into the subject matter of my script, however, there were some slight issues with this form of banknote experimentation. I originally had international banknotes on hand to manipulate – these were flexible and could be bent to whatever form I desired. When I did get my hands on New Zealand banknotes, I realised they were made of a polymer material as opposed to the papery textures of international currency. This flexible substance was difficult to fold and maintain origami shapes with, therefore I changed my trajectory. The banknotes are stop-motion animated, like the coins. With these sections, I have taken inspiration from the set-up of *Coinstar* (PES, 2005). Like PES' use of household objects, the banknotes in *Moneybags* slither out from a jacket pocket or fall from the clothes dryer to return to the wallet. Since this section comes after the coins have been introduced, it provides a new angle and orientation to keep audiences entertained.

From previous experience, I also wanted to pursue an interest in motion graphics as an advanced skill and potential career. I was eager to produce this final artefact with motion graphics to highlight this knowledge, and so my first attempt in this avenue was a very brief animatic explaining the term effective altruism¹⁴ which at the time was the forefront of my investigation. None of this material was used in the final artefact, but the processes to develop it were. During my time as a teaching assistant, I encountered a unique and flexible way to create storyboards; by using sticky notes (*Figure 16*). Using a wall as the backboard, it is easy to organise, align and restructure boards where necessary. They are also efficient to transfer into editing software; I merely scan them on a mobile app and line them up for a video. I repeated this process with another animatic focusing on discussing student loans around a campfire and one of the iterations of my final project.



Figure 16: Worsnop, L. *Sticky note storyboard process*. [Screenshot]. (2021)

¹⁴ Effective altruism is a philosophy and social movement that advocates using the most effective, evidence-based strategies to benefit others. In my investigation it was focused more on charitable giving, a domain in which ordinary people can have a large impact (Caviola et al., 2021).

When developing the currency concept in *Moneybags*, I wanted to use the medium of motion graphics and dive into the banknote literally, by taking the features of the New Zealand five dollar banknote and animating them. I thought this would be an interesting avenue to explore because my topic of financial privilege is abstract and this would provide an opportunity to use pictures that cannot be executed using stop motion alone. This difference in visuals also takes the viewer on a journey, a visual representation of the journey I want them to take contentwise. I could not rip off the graphics completely, as made apparent in the guidelines (Reserve Bank of New Zealand, 2015). Instead, I desired to make this an artistic representation of the currency design (*Figure 17*). I digitally illustrated these intricate patterns from the banknote and scattered them around each background. All of the hand-drawn assets in this section had the distinctive crosshatch shading that is seen in the portraits of any New Zealand banknote. The warm earthy tones of the five dollar note were important to keep because they helped maintain the idea of being within the banknote, especially when other mediums like live-action stop motion were inserted during this section.

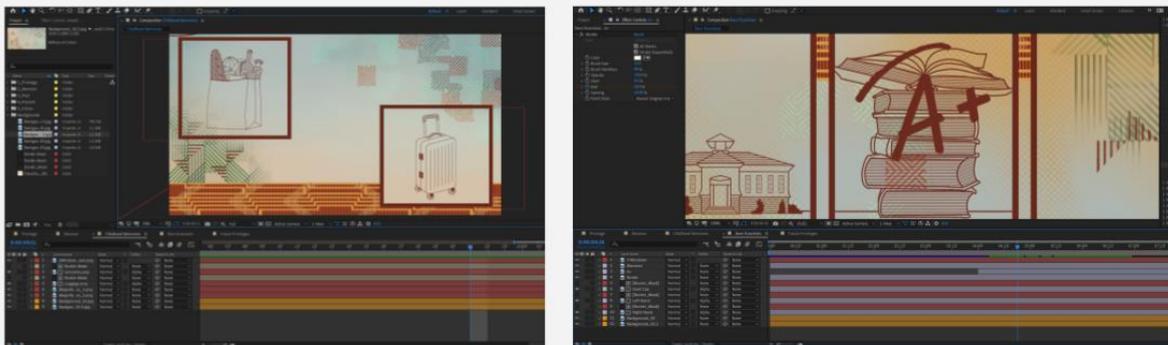


Figure 17: Worsnop, L. *Assembling the motion graphics*. [Screenshot]. (2022)

4.3 | Conjuring the Final Artefact

The final artefact created in this thesis combines my research findings from the contextual review and medium experimentation using research design methods, to create the best visual medium to discuss financial privilege.

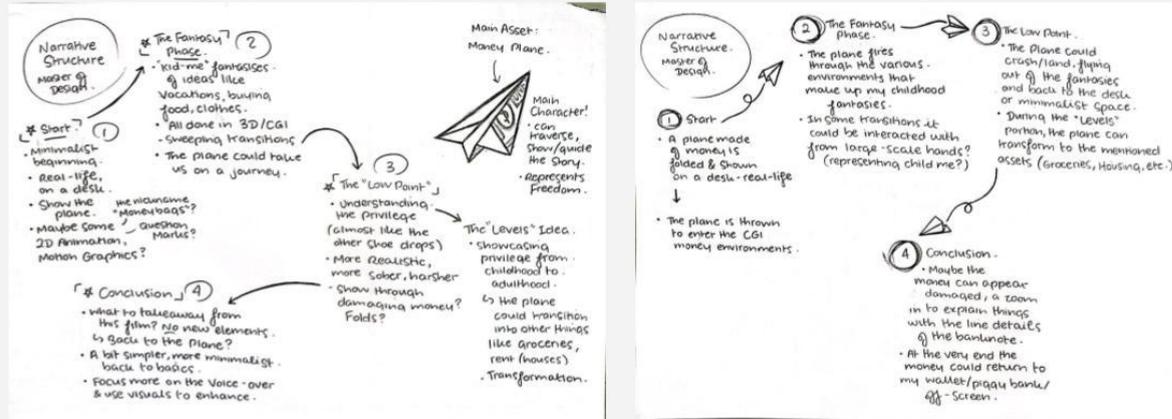


Figure 18: Worsnop, L. Narrative brainstorm. [Screenshot]. (2022)

The original script was going to focus on one specific protagonist. Because the banknote concept was a concrete selection, I brainstormed a form of origami this might take. An early idea was to have the banknote transform multiple times to represent the subject matter of the voiceover, but it would have been too complicated to devise multiple origami, and some of my ideas are too difficult to contain in one symbol. I originally wanted the banknote to fold into a paper plane; not only are these easy to create, but through symbolism, I conceived this idea of having the money plane represent freedom – à la the financial privilege I hold as a child born into inherited wealth (Figure 18). Planes in general are associated with the luxuries of travel as well, which was envisaged in some of my CGI and motion graphics scenes. When the CGI scenes became redundant, the plane idea crumbled in the rough edit stages. It became too difficult to keep one asset going for the entire film, especially since motion graphics is fast-paced and changes subject matter quickly.

Due to this pacing factor, I deemed it unnecessary to declare a singular protagonist character, rather having the continuity of multiple assets throughout the film. This list includes the coins and banknotes that are a direct product of my financial privilege. There is also a recurring theme of hands. I did not notice this repetition before rewriting the script, but I realised my hands were prevalent in the majority of the pre-existing scenes. In the storyboard stages of *Moneybags*, they were mainly used as a tool to introduce other subject matter. Since then I have brainstormed alternate uses for the hands, like representing emotion through movement, symbolising hands as action, and using hands to communicate that I have acted on my beliefs.

Change doesn't come without sacrifice, and a difficult decision I was faced with was keeping or removing the CGI environments. As mentioned in the Contextual Review, I was set on

experimenting with stop-motion animation in digital software after watching the *Miro Wine* (Greally & Martin-Babin, 2021) animated short. When the first script fell apart the childhood dreams section became outdated. Because of this, the CGI models had no reason to exist in the end product. I put months of effort into such a short but extravagant sequence. I do not regret the effort, as I learnt new techniques for the VFX industry, but it was a sorely missed sacrifice.

One last challenge I had when finalising *Moneybags* was finding the right length for the film. Initially my preproduction material and rough edit finished at four minutes – this is simply too long to keep audiences entertained. My chosen mediums of motion graphics, stop motion and VFX are time-consuming processes that are designed to be quick, sequential visuals. Eventually, I cropped it to a 2.5-minute script, with a maximum time of three minutes – this way I could design the visuals to be quick and impressive, while also having room for sensible pacing and longer pauses in the voiceover.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my experimentation both in the narrative and material categories to establish what functioned best for incorporating themes of childhood nostalgia and adulthood financial guilt, in my short film. Several points were taken into consideration for the final undertaking; understanding the importance of a narrative structure, narrative devices in an otherwise non-narrative film, and the choice of using digital practices for a traditional look – altogether these decisions result in an eye-catching work. I have also gained new tools and additional knowledge of software to make design workflows more efficient. Reflecting on my iterations during the creation allows me to gain a better footing for my experiences and how they may present to audiences.

Chapter 5 | Conclusion

Moneybags is a creative endeavour to discuss financial privilege and my personal experiences with it. Drawing upon both pre-existing concepts and my personal journey to understanding

this invisible advantage, I have used stop-motion animation, motion graphics and VFX to express the shame, reflection and action that come with learning about financial privilege.

Having mixed media as my chosen format made sense with my previous experiences with VFX, a tool that already merges multiple processes together. It brings versatility to the creative practice, allowing me to take the best features of each medium and combine them in a moving image piece that captivates the eye in every shot. A downfall that has come with mixed media is keeping the mediums integrated. At times I struggle with having *blocks* of work where I only use one medium. This defeats the point of *mixed* media, where everything blends together in one composition. One solution I have gathered from this problem is the value of practice. Practising using these mediums together, and brainstorming how the words of voiceover will be visualised with multiple materials in mind, allows an artist to use new and more visually interesting concepts. Creating mixed media is also vulnerable to over-complication; not knowing where to stop or if *every* medium needs to be incorporated in a shot. Practice allows for trial and error, so the most effective media can develop in the final outcome.

Upon reflection, it would have rounded out the final artefact to have additional stories included in *Moneybags*. It can be a disadvantage for the investigation being confined to my personal experiences – not everyone will agree or relate, thus losing some relatability. An ethics form may have allowed secondary opinions, but that would also introduce the concern of generalising or comparing experiences. If I had the resources, one plan would be to extend this film to include other people's experiences as well, but this would change the tone and basis of the investigation presented here. In terms of future endeavors regarding this subject, I can draw upon this personal interpretation and commit to more collaborative projects that address different iterations of financial privilege. Through life experiences the nature of this topic and its conversations will change, but strengthen the reasoning of why we should discuss this in the first place.

My journey with financial privilege fundamentally changed my perception of the world. This work attempts to encourage viewers to partake in this acknowledgement through a creative piece of work. I cannot claim that *Moneybags* is the only answer to experiencing financial privilege, nor can it be a concrete representation of what financial privilege looks like in other people's lives. What I can only hope is that this short film contributes to the realisation of other people who have just started their acknowledgements. Everything starts from square one, and perhaps the end of my thesis journey could be the inception of someone else's research.

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