

Journey to Faith: A creative exploration of a personal journey to the Christian faith.

Timothy Haryadi

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ABSTRACT

Journey to Faith is a narrative sequence that draws on my experience of becoming a Christian. The story of the sequence follows the creation of a humanoid clay sculpture, which represents my Christian journey from an autoethnographic perspective. This project investigates how to express this deeply personal experience using the mediums of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) and Visual Effects (VFX) to creatively visualize the experiences of faith. The story is separated into three acts, with each act exploring an aspect of my journey through surrealist metaphors and references to biblical allegories. This project is informed by theological, as well as philosophical concepts that have contextualized this research and supported the development of the artefact.

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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.

Timothy Haryadi
14/09/2020

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Timothy Haryadi
14/09/2020

INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research project centres around exploring my experience in Christianity, to better understand how to communicate deeply personal experiences in a visual medium. I have chosen the medium of CGI/VFX to visualize this journey due to its potential to communicate experiences in creative and profound ways. This project explores the relationship between human experience and visual representation, giving insight into how humans interpret personal experiences. This exegesis discusses the critical and methodological dimensions of the research and outlines the iterative developments and influences that have contributed to the final narrative sequence.

The exegesis is divided into four chapters:

The first chapter discusses my positions as a researcher. These positions include my experience with Christianity and how it has shaped my worldview and my stance on visual narrative, discussing why I picked CGI/VFX as a suitable medium to explore complex thoughts.

The second chapter provides a contextual review of existing knowledge that has contributed to the design of my research. It discusses theological and philosophical theories on the concept of faith and investigates phenomenology, exploring how humans respond to experiences. The chapter concludes with a discussion on artists who have influenced the visual development of the artefact.

The third chapter outlines the research paradigms I have used in this research. The chapter examines how I applied autoethnographic methods, such as self-reflective analysis to inform the development of my practice. The chapter also discusses methods of action research and design thinking, investigating iterative research models that structure my self-reflective data for use in the development of my artefact.

The fourth and final chapter gives a detailed commentary on the artefact. This chapter reflects upon what I have learned throughout the development process, such as the importance of metaphor as a narrative tool and how I have enacted a 'hand-crafted' approach to practice.

1. POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER

VISUAL ARTS

Visual arts always have been a passion of mine and are a big part of how I learn. Whether through painting, photography, or filmmaking, visual arts provide me with tools to make sense of the world around me. It was not until I studied Digital Design at AUT that my understanding of visual arts began to flourish. I began to see the potential of visual arts, in particular CGI/VFX, as effective storytelling media to express complex thinking. During this time, I created works to use this medium to express aspects of subjective human experience.

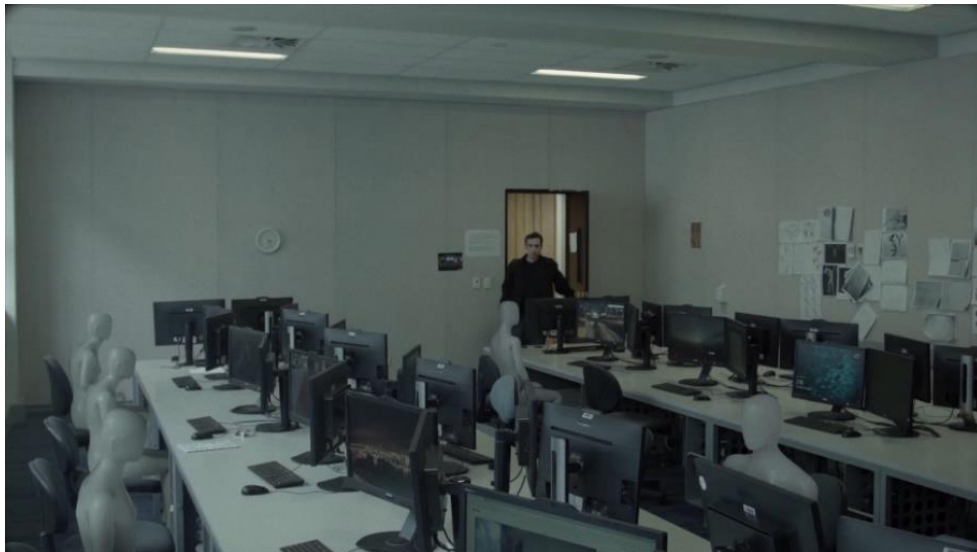


Figure 01: Haryadi, T. *Alarm*. [Short Film]. (2018)

The short film *Alarm* was a project of the final year of my undergraduate diploma in Digital Design. The aim of this project was to use CGI/VFX to explore social anxiety through a narrative short film. The film centres on a person suffering from social anxiety and the circumstances surrounding it. One benefit I found in using CGI/VFX was its ability to express emotional subtext. One method I used to explore this concept was the use of CGI mannequins. This element visualized the alienation of the protagonist, as he feels disconnected from those around him. Through this project, I was able to glimpse the potential of CGI/VFX in communicating emotion in a tangible and direct way.

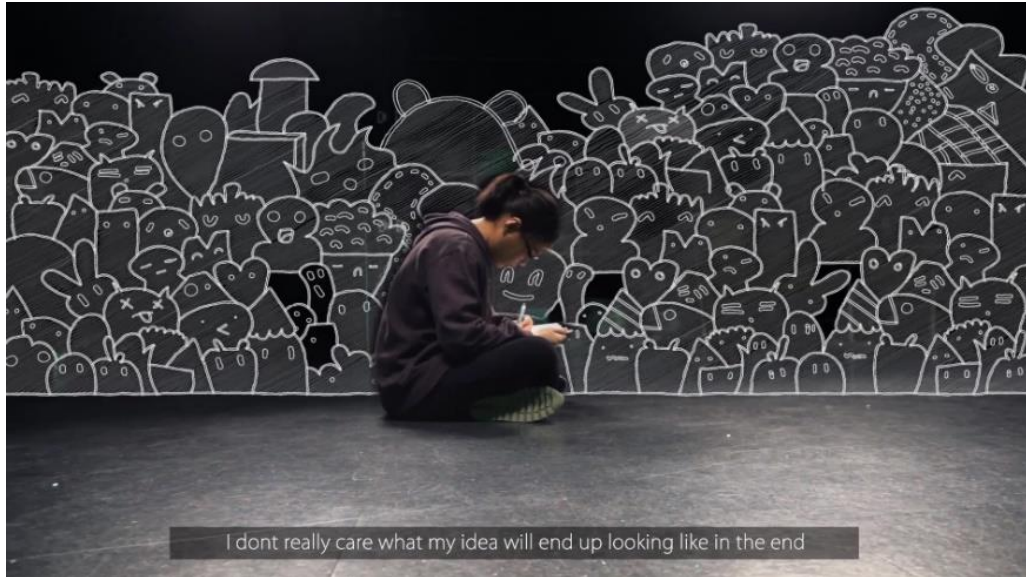


Figure 2: Haryadi, T. *It Starts with an Idea*. [Animated Documentary]. (2017)

The Animated Documentary *It Starts with an Idea* was also a project of my undergraduate diploma. The documentary told the story of my classmate and her creative process as an artist. Like the first project, this sequence used CGI/VFX to explore emotional themes. In this case, this tool was a supporting attribute to heighten the thematic and narrative beats within the piece. This was demonstrated through the use of motion graphics and typography to visually enhance the dialogue. CGI/VFX gave clarity to other aspects of the sequence.

Both projects concern aspects of interior life I have aimed to explore through CGI/VFX. I have found one of the biggest strengths of this medium is how it extends the creative possibilities of visual storytelling. As a visual thinker, this medium enables me to give a tangible form to an experience that has been the subject of contemplation for many years. By conveying my journey to Christianity in this way I can also examine my own beliefs and understand what faith means to me on a deeper level. Moreover, visual representation allows me to share this experience with others.

CHRISTIANITY

My worldview is shaped by my Christian faith, which has developed through many years of contemplation. I did not always have the faith in God I have now. Earlier in my life, I perceived God as an all-powerful figure who needed to be pleased for His followers to have a prosperous life. In developing this project, I have reflected on feelings and experiences that led me to deepen my beliefs to understand how I came to see Him not as an entity detached from His followers, but as a presence with whom I feel I have a personal relationship. This familial yet metaphysical relationship is something very difficult to make sense of, even for me. Yet, even though I don't have any concrete justification for these feelings, what I do know for a fact is these feelings are real and have profoundly shaped my beliefs.

This conundrum has led me to this research project, in the hope I would be able to create something tangible through which I could make sense of my own experience. One significant goal of this research is to communicate to others what it means for me, as a Christian, to have faith, and to explore how to express that idea through creative means. To clarify, this research does not aim to convert individuals to share my views or preach about the benefits of Christianity. Rather, my aim is to create a work that may help to deepen understanding of this aspect of human experience and create opportunities for further discussion on the nature of faith and belief.

2. CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores key theological and philosophical ideas associated with faith and belief. I have examined these ideas to deepen my understanding of critical concepts related to faith. This chapter also explores critical perspectives of phenomenology. This concept underpins my understanding of both the conceptualization and representation of faith, providing insight into how we understand human experience. In addition to investigating conceptual theory around faith and experience, I also discuss several creative works in visual arts that have been influential in shaping the creative exploration of my artefact.

PHENOMENOLOGY

The main phenomenological concept that has informed this research is the importance of context when trying to understand human experience. Edmund Husserl, the principle founder of phenomenology, proposes that, when humans try to comprehend a topic or an experience, they anchor their thoughts to memories associated with that subject (Husserl, 1975). In exploration of this idea, I have also found emotional connection to memory is a significant aspect to consider. Robert Plutchik argues the comprehension of memory comes from our emotional response to it (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2011). Another significant aspect to memory is visual comprehension. John Berger asserts that visual stimulus is the first touch point to which an individual refers, to make sense of the world. This is because visual stimulus establishes a rational baseline to comprehension, since it is something tangible and verifiable (Berger, 2008). However, what we comprehend from this sense is also influenced by our worldview:

The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. In the middle Ages when men believed in the physical existence of Hell the sight of fire must have meant something different from what it means today. Nevertheless, their idea of Hell owed a lot to the sight of fire consuming and the ashes remaining - as well as to their experience of the pain of burns.

(Berger, 2008. p. 8)

On the topic of visual comprehension of human experience, Vivian Sobchack explores this relationship through the medium of film. Sobchack states that by realizing our experiences in a visual format, the artist creates a tangible outcome. This outcome allows the artist to analyse experience from a detached point of view, which also allows the artist to interpret new meanings from experiences (Sobchack, 2020). Sobchack also argues film allows artists to share their experiences with others. This is possible because of our shared sense of sight, and since the format of film embodies this shared sense, the viewer can better relate to the concepts illustrated in the visual work (Sobchack, 2020).

These phenomenological concepts have influenced how I reflect upon my journey to faith. These ideas pushed me to discern events during my journey that have strong emotional connections, and which shaped my worldview. By unpacking my journey in this way, I'm able to see a clearer picture of the representative themes and concepts. These concepts have pushed me to reflect upon events in my journey in a visual way. Encapsulating these events in a visual medium allows me to recognize and highlight the emotional impact of these milestones in a tangible form and communicate these themes and emotions to a wider audience, as Sobchack identified.

THE CONCEPT OF FAITH

I began investigating the concept of faith by looking at theological and philosophical theories that try to articulate its nature. I have also used auto-ethnographic methods that helped me reflect upon the findings of these investigations ¹. This process led me to define three concepts pivotal to my faith journey: *meaning*, *love*, and *doubt*. This section discusses key theological and philosophical theories that support the relevance of these ideas when discussing an individual's sense of faith. Among these contexts, I will be referencing secular philosophers such as Victor Frankl and theologians like Paul Tillich. These investigations are undertaken to frame my concepts to a wider context of knowledge. These theories have influenced the narrative design of my artefact by helping me understand the rational or theological basis of what it means to have faith in Christianity.

¹ The details of this auto-ethnographic method can be found in the *Research Design* chapter under the heading *Information Gathering*

MEANING

Victor Frankl places meaning as a critical quality that defines humanity, the only human trait that can never be taken away from us (Frankl, 2004). In terms of how it applies within our journey of life, Frankl describes meaning as what drives our lives, concluding, “Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual” (Frankl, 2004, p. 85).

This search for answers to life’s questions relates to my journey to faith through the sense of fulfilment I found in finding that solution in Christianity. This fulfilment in finding identity within Christianity is also tied to a feeling of self-worth. Crescioni & Baumeister identify self-worth as one of the key aspects that contribute to an individual’s sense of meaning. This is because meaning allows the individual to validate whether their existence is worthwhile (Crescioni & Baumeister, 2013). This validation is expressed in my own journey through the hope I felt in knowing my life is valuable in the eyes of a higher power. This concept of value can be theologically identified as a critical concept which strengthens a Christian’s sense of meaning. John Piper describes a Christian’s value as stemming from belief in being made for a purpose by God:

The proper understanding of everything in life begins with God. No one will ever understand the necessity of conversion who does not know why God created us. He created us “in His image” so that we would image forth his glory in the world. We were made to be prisms refracting the light of God’s glory into all of life. Why God should want to give us a share in shining with His glory is a great mystery. Call it grace or mercy or love – it is an unspeakable wonder.

(Piper, 2011, p. 56).

This idea of finding purpose within a higher power was also elaborated by C.S Lewis, who used the analogy of a fleet of ships to describe how God gives Christians a reason for being and a destination in which to can look forward (Lewis, 1944). This idea of purpose can also be reflected upon in my journey, as this sense of direction gave me a feeling of assurance and security.

LOVE

The second concept that defines my journey to faith is love. This concept helped me understand the significance of compassion and empathy in a person's faith. Inglis describes love as,

central to being human, to creating meaning, and living a full life. It is a crucial element of the cultural air we breathe. Being able to love and be loved is a model for how to live a good life..... Love may not have always made the world go around, but sympathy, concern and compassion for others have always been central to human existence.

(Inglis, 2013, p. 105).

From this, we can identify love as a quality fuelled by an emotional connection with another person. In this context, Pahuus describes this love as “a mixture of warm emotions fuelled by our wish to be with another person” (Pahuus, 2018, p. 7). In light of this, we can see, through interpersonal relationships, the individuals involved can experience fulfilment within themselves. (Pahuus, 2018). This idea can be seen reflected in my journey through my belief of having a personal relationship with God, and how that connection gives me fulfilment.

In a theological context, this personal connection between man and God is what defines how Christians view love. One important aspect that demonstrates this view is the idea of God's unconditional love. Thomas Jay Oord describes Christian love as an agape love, a love that is intentional and promotes well-being, even when confronted with hostility. (Oord, 2010). This concept is exemplified through the Biblical event of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Bridges identifies the biblical belief that Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself to save humanity as the ultimate display of agape love, one which is self-sacrificing and seeks to serve others. (Bridges, 2016). It is through this biblical example that Christians reflect this love in their own lives. (Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, 2019). This concept can also be seen in my journey, through the sense of joy and warmth I felt in knowing that God has demonstrated that agape love to me as well.

DOUBT

The third and final concept in my journey to faith is doubt. This concept gave insight into the role of uncertainty in one's faith and how people reconcile with this emotion. René Descartes claims doubt is present within all aspects of our lives, as we can never be sure that what we have deemed to be matters of fact are true. Descartes uses the analogy of dreams to suggest how unreliable our senses can be when determining facts about our reality and that our conception of truth is based on presuppositions (Descartes, 1986). These presuppositions are what leads to the feeling of uncertainty, as we are stuck between two decisions, unable to commit to either side. While this indecision can have a negative impact on a person's judgement, it can also help in pushing a person to reflect upon why they have these doubts. Pier Benn theorizes that one must have doubt to avoid developing a distorted way of thinking:

Even though feeling secure in such commitments makes for happiness, there are requirements of honesty and rationality that should never be brushed aside. There are times when we need to learn to doubt: when we need to develop a kind of mental self-control that helps us keep tabs on reality, by reminding us of how utterly fallible we are. And that means that we must be prepared for sacrifices of happiness, for the sake of integrity.

(Benn, 2014, p. 152)

This idea of coming to terms with our fallibility is reflected within my own faith journey through the process of embracing and accepting my doubts as part of the process to faith. This process of acceptance can also be seen explored theologically. Paul Tillich claims doubt is an intrinsic part of the Christian journey, stating "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith" (Tillich, 1975, p. 116-117). Tillich views doubt as a natural response to one's decision to commit oneself to the Christian life, as the very nature of what Christians believe hinges upon trusting on the things yet to be seen (Tillich, 1975). Timothy Keller also expands upon this idea, stating doubt can be a fuel to critically reflect upon one's faith and allows one to establish a rational base to one's beliefs (Keller, 2009).

CREATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

I have investigated a range of creative works that have explored personal, abstract and spiritual experiences. This section will focus on the key works that informed the development of my research. These works were chosen from different time periods, from the 19th to the 21st century. These works allow me a wider understanding of approaches to the visualization and exploration of human experience across different mediums and over time. This analysis also provides insight into how I can better translate complex emotions into tangible visual experiences.

STILL IMAGE: PAINTING

This section discusses still images, in particular in the painting discipline. I have chosen to analyse works by Thomas Cole (19th Century) and Salvador Dali (20th Century). Both these artists emphasize emotion to drive the shape and form of their artwork. This approach is relevant in informing me how better to express emotional themes in my work.

19th CENTURY: THOMAS COLE



Figure 03. Cole, T. The Voyage of Life: Manhood. [Oil on Canvas]. (1842)

Image Retrieved July 23rd, 2020, from <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.52452.html>

The 19th century Romanticism movement viewed art through an emotional and spiritual lens. (Rosenthal, 2008). One particular artist who interested me within this movement was Thomas Cole and his painting, 'Voyage of Life: Manhood' (1842).

This work was part of a series of paintings exploring the four stages of life (Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age) through the voyage of a man. 'Manhood' explores the struggles of manhood and follows the man as he travels on a boat through the rapids of a river. One way this piece explores the struggle of manhood is through its composition. Cole places a great emphasis on expressing the themes behind his artworks through the background details. As Louis Legrand Noble writes in his study of this series, "It was Cole's aim to give, in all his landscapes, that spiritual meaning which he himself drew from nature, and to teach, when the subject admitted of it, a strong moral lesson." (Noble, 1856, p. 290). One theme Cole expresses through this work was the feeling of hope and faith, expressed through the depiction of the angel in the top left. As Noble further notes, Cole himself confirms the feelings of faith expressed by these elements:

The Voyager is now a man of middle age: the helm of the boat is gone, and as he looks imploringly toward heaven, as if heaven's aid alone could save him from the perils that surround him. The Guardian Spirit Calmly sits in the clouds, watching, with an air of solicitude, the affrighted Voyager: Demon forms are hovering in the air.

(Noble, 1856, p. 288-289).

This artwork gave me insight into how I can inject subtext through background elements. This technique also allows me to express deeper meaning within the creative work without distracting the viewer from the work's main themes and visual direction.

20th CENTURY: SALVADOR DALI

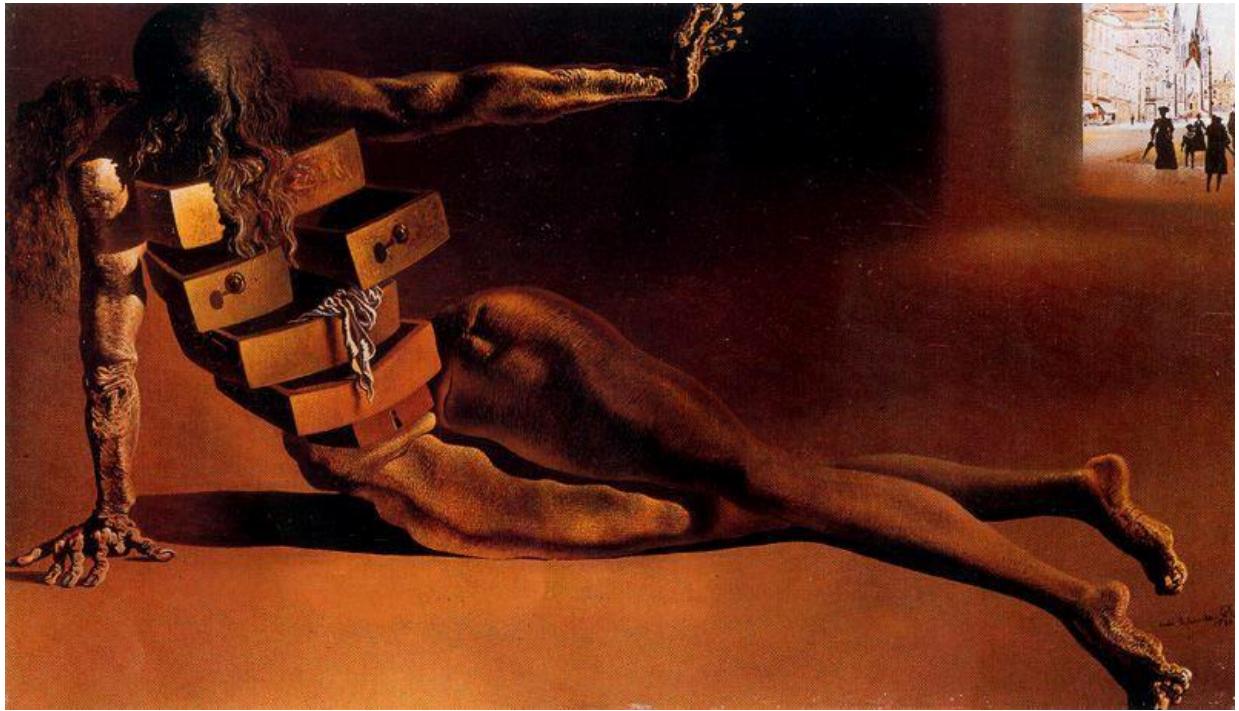


Figure 04. Dali, S. *The Anthropomorphic Cabinet*. [Oil on Panel]. (1936)

Image Retrieved July 22nd, 2020, from <https://www.dalipaintings.com/the-anthropomorphic-cabinet.jsp#prettyPhoto>

Moving on to the 20th century, the surrealist movement emphasized the abstract side of emotion. With the earliest conceptions of surrealism influenced by Freudian theories of the unconscious mind, surrealist work aimed to visualize unconscious thoughts and feelings within the human experience. (Fijalkowski & Richardson, 2016). Salvador Dali's 'The Anthropomorphic Cabinet' (1936) has been influential to the development of my research. The painting depicts a female figure made from drawers with her hand stretched out towards a view of a city. This painting is influential to my research because of the artwork's use of visual metaphor. One significant metaphor Dali uses is the imagery of empty drawers. In his study of Dali's influential works, Eric Shanes claims this visual element expresses the feeling of emptiness felt by the subject, stating;

the drawers here are empty, and the woman with her head buried in the topmost drawer seems utterly despondent. At the top-right Dalí has carefully recreated a fin de siècle view of a city. Judging by the woman's gesture, withered skin and empty drawers, her despair seems to be caused as much by the loss of her past as by her inner emptiness.

(Shanes, 2015, p. 185)

Through this visual metaphor, Dali is able to present a deep subject as profound and straightforward as possible. This nonsensical use of metaphor influenced the design of my creative work. This technique allows me to express emotional themes through profound imagery that highlights meaning rather than visual accuracy (Fijalkowski & Richardson, 2016). Dali also experimented with these concepts in the medium of film. A VFX pioneer in his own way, Dali's contribution to films such as 'Spellbound' (1945) extended the possibilities of human expression: this work was one of the early iterations that expressed abstract human experiences within a moving image medium.

MOVING IMAGE: CGI/VFX

From the 21st century to the present, technological advances have led to the rise of digital images and effects as one of the leading mediums of human expression. Kristen Whissel points out that this rise was mainly attributed to the versatility of the medium, as it allowed the artist to express narratives not visually achievable within our reality. (Whissel, 2014). In this section I will be investigating two designers who utilize CGI/VFX within moving image: Patrick Clair and FutureDeluxe.

PATRICK CLAIR



Figure 05. Clair, P. Westworld title sequence. *Westworld*. [Digital Sequence]. (2016)

Image Retrieved July 28th, 2020, from <https://vimeo.com/185327408>

Patrick Clair's opening sequence of *Westworld* (2016) has inspired the development of my artefact through its cinematography. The way Clair frames his shots in intentional and creative ways allows him to express narrative beats and themes more clearly. The piece is able to achieve this effect using a virtual camera. Since the sequence is entirely digital, Clair can freely manipulate all the elements within the piece, including the digital camera used to film it. What is significant about this virtual camera is that it is unbound from the laws of physics which would have limited a physical camera. As a result, the virtual camera can be placed anywhere within the digital space, opening up more avenues for creative exploration for visual storytelling through cinematography. Shilo Mclean also notes this potential of using virtual cameras, stating;

on a practical level, almost every kind of imaginative and difficult shot now can be accomplished by using a digital suture....Underwater shots, subterranean shots, extraordinary angles, transitions to and from different points of view, and visual links between settings in a form of montage can be made without any restrictions except the imaginations of the director.

(McClean, 2008, p. 49)

By exploring the potential of the virtual camera, I'm able to express my complex themes of faith and spirituality more clearly through cinematography and composition. This technique allows me to be more creative and intentional with how I direct my audience's attention and allows me to create a visual progression that can be both immersive and easily understood.

FUTUREDELUXE

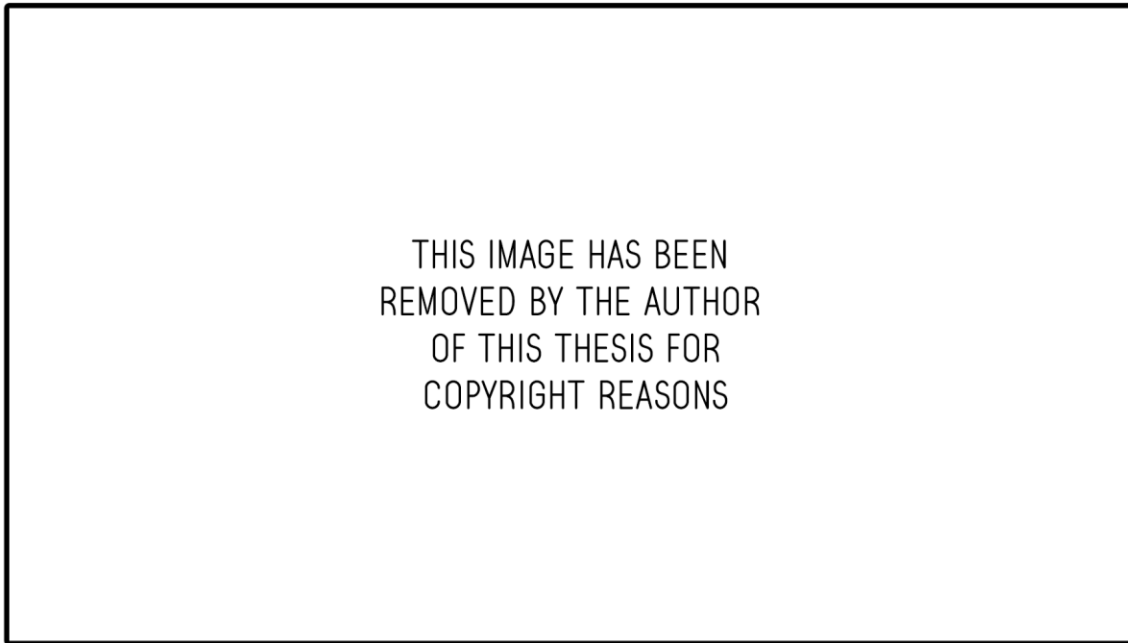


Figure 06. FutureDeluxe. *Plume*. [Digital Sequence]. (2014)

Image Retrieved July 28th, 2020, from <https://vimeo.com/229537127>

FutureDeluxe's work has influenced the development of my artefact through its experimental approach to CGI. The work titled 'Plume' demonstrates this idea through its uses of organic and geometric elements to create dynamic human forms. What is striking about this work is how the sequence remixes digital elements to deliver a theme in a profound way.

The piece explores new visual methods by combining explorations of colour, shape and texture with the human form to explore the symbolic connection between human and bird. As stated by the creators themselves, the piece is "a surreal and experimental arts piece" (Wacom, n.d.), and it is this surrealist aesthetic and exploration of themes that has influenced the development of my own project.

As the field of digital media and VFX develops, we are able to see more experimental uses of this technology that extend the possibilities of expression within the moving image medium. Stephen Prince comments on this potential:

Digital images take viewers through the looking glass into new landscapes of vision unavailable to ordinary sense, enable them to peer into domains of the imagination. In the process, they have given filmmakers new methods for extending the aesthetics of cinema.

(Prince, 2011, p. 55)

Designers such as Clair and FutureDeluxe stretch the boundaries of what digital images can do while also building upon existing techniques in order to create experiences never experienced before by audiences.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored a range of literature, creative works and theories that relate to the concept of faith and experience. I have investigated philosophical and theological contexts which have helped me better understand the spiritual and rational base surrounding an individual's relationship with faith and Christianity. I have also analysed several creative works from influential artists and designers who gave me insight into the representation of human experience, as well as how the representations evolved throughout history. I have also explored key concepts around CGI/VFX and its visual methods to better understand how to use this medium to express my journey to faith.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

This project is practice-based research. This entails the gathering and reviewing of a wide range of knowledge synthesized into a creative artefact using my practice. (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). The nature of this project is a qualitative, subjective inquiry and is approached from a relativist position. The main concern of this project is not to establish concrete theories, but to explore the creative potential between abstract spiritual experiences and CGI/VFX. This chapter discusses the methodological framework used in this project. The framework involves using an Action Research model influenced by Design Thinking. This framework also uses an auto-ethnographic methodology through a self-reflective and iterative development process. This chapter also discusses the practice-based research methods which have contributed to the outcome of this research.

DESIGN THINKING/ ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

This research model is mainly influenced by an Action Research methodology, which emphasizes learning through iterative, self-reflective practice (McNiff, 2013). The model also incorporates principles within Design Thinking, which finds its learning outcomes through a plan of action that invokes critical, analytical and creative reflection to reach a desired outcome (Pressman, 2018). Through a combination of these two methodologies, I have created a research model that considers the critical and analytical variables, while also emphasizing practice as the main method that progresses the research forward.

The structure of my model is based on Andrew Pressman's Design Thinking research model. This model is made up of five stages: Information Gathering, Problem Analysis and Definition, Idea Generation, Synthesis through Modelling, and Critical Evaluation (Pressman, 2018). Taking this structure into my own practice-based research model, I simplified this process into three distinct phases to centre the model around learning through practice: information gathering, synthesis through practice, and refinement/evaluation.

PHASE 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

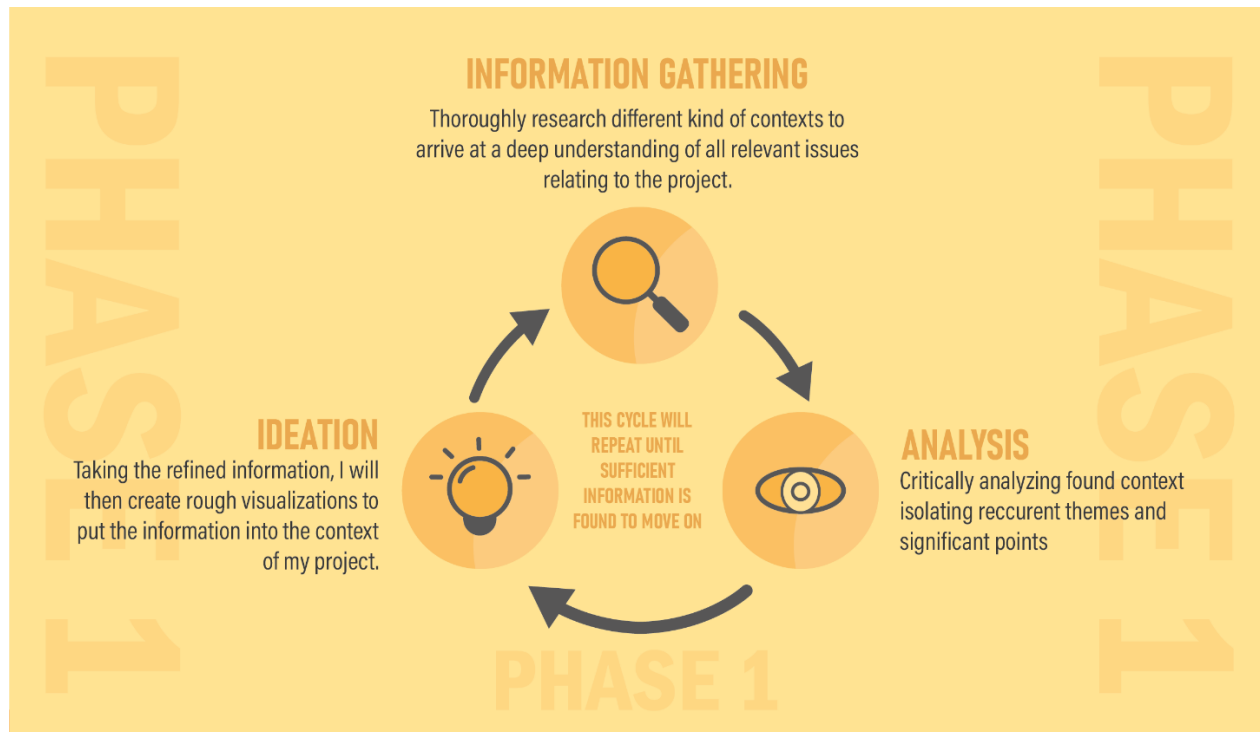


Figure 07. Haryadi, T. *Design Thinking influenced Action Research model Phase 1*. [Screenshot]. (2019)

This phase focuses on exploring ideas through contextual research and creative ideation, influenced by an auto-ethnographic methodology. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that focuses on using the author's self-reflection as data to investigate and understand certain experiences (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography explores personal experiences through an instinctive lens, choosing to highlight the subjective elements of an experience to gain insight (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography enables me to reflect upon my own experiences of faith and articulate my findings from a reflexive position.

This phase also uses autoethnographic research methods to drive the findings. This comes in the form of an auto-ethnographic research journal that focuses on recording my thoughts and observations around concepts of faith and encapsulating them through creative means such as sketching and creative writing.

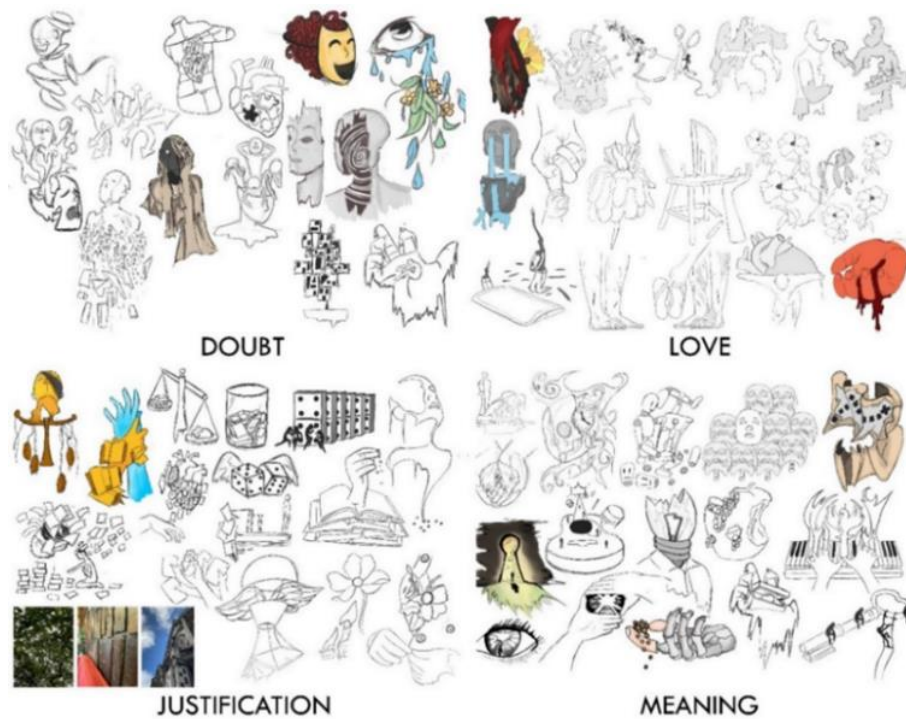


Figure 08. Haryadi, T. *Ideation sketches from the research journal*. [Screenshot]. (2019)

This method is inspired by a narrative writing exercise called ‘text spinning and collaging’. This exercise involves the author reflecting upon a certain topic and synthesizing his reflections through a story or image (Adams et al., 2015). Taking this concept into my own research, I developed an activity that takes the basic concept of ‘text spinning and collaging’ but places a greater emphasis on creative practice such as sketching. This version of the method also places an emphasis on contextual research, in order to have a more informed reflection when reflecting on my chosen topic.

This activity first involves a contextual research that investigates a topic surrounding the concept of faith and belief. After undertaking a contextual research, I progressed to critically engage with the findings of my investigation, discerning recurring themes and significant concepts. The final step to this activity is reflecting upon the results of my analysis and synthesizing them through narrative writing or visual sketching. This research method is useful in informing the development of my artefact, as the creative outputs from my research journal can also be used to inform the visual development of my artefact. Through using this method to investigate and reflect on my own experience with Christianity, I identified three key concepts that best describe my journey to faith. These concepts are defined as Meaning, Doubt and Love.

PHASE 2: SYNTHESIS THROUGH PRACTICE

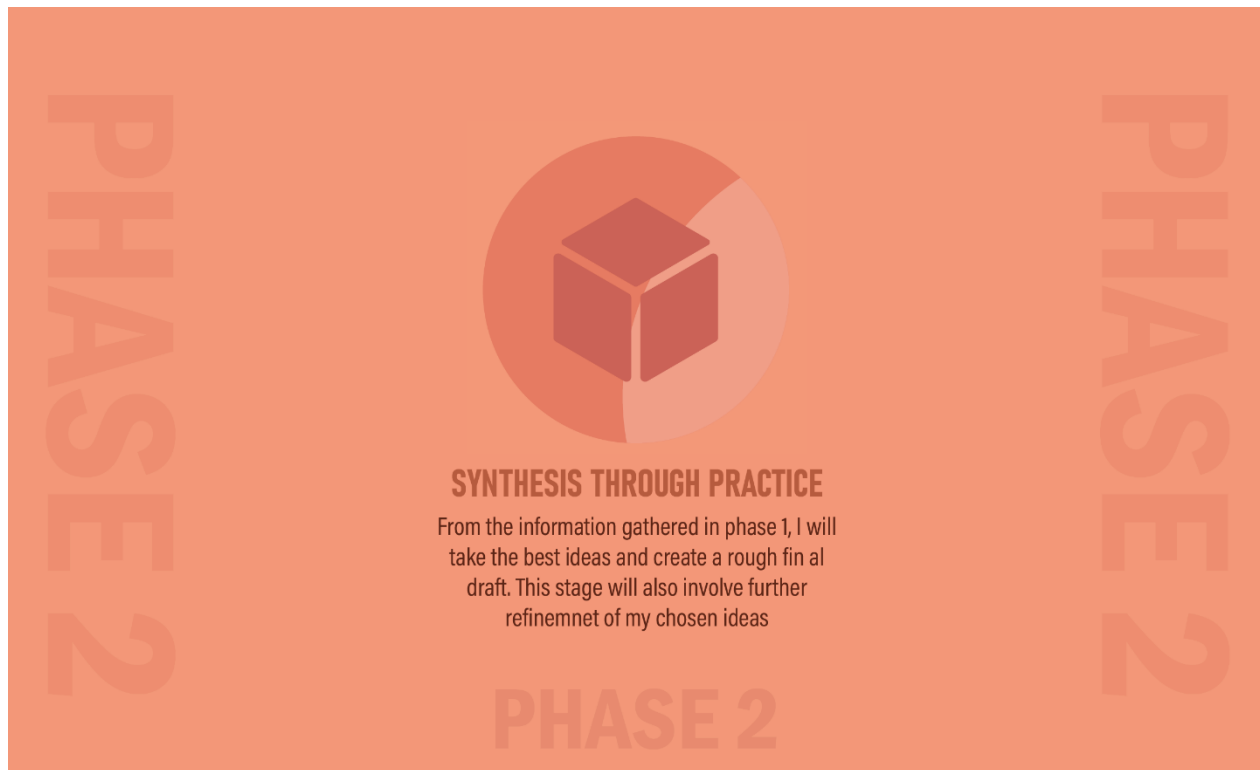


Figure 09. Haryadi, T. *Design Thinking influenced Action Research model* Phase 2 [Screenshot]. (2019)

The second phase in my design thinking/action research model is *Synthesis through practice*. This phase involves taking the significant concepts I found from the previous phase and refining them within the context of my practice. This refinement revolves around prototyping/simulating my ideas using CGI/VFX. This stage also places a great emphasis on the creation of prototypes like rough pre-visualization and storyboards.

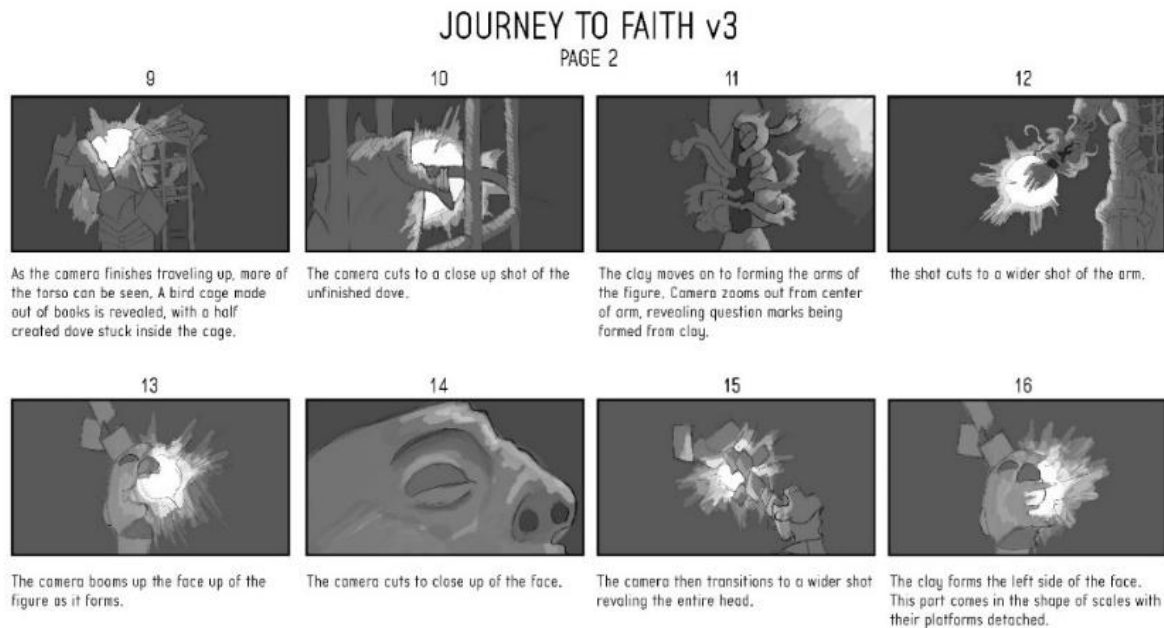


Figure 10. Haryadi, T. *'Journey to Faith' Final storyboard page 4*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

The method of prototyping is significant within this phase as it allows me to engage within my practice while also being able to efficiently test new ideas and solutions that contribute to the final artefact (Gengnagel et al., 2015). This method is demonstrated through the visual tests I created during the development of the final sequence. These tests include pre-visualizations of various elements of my artefact.

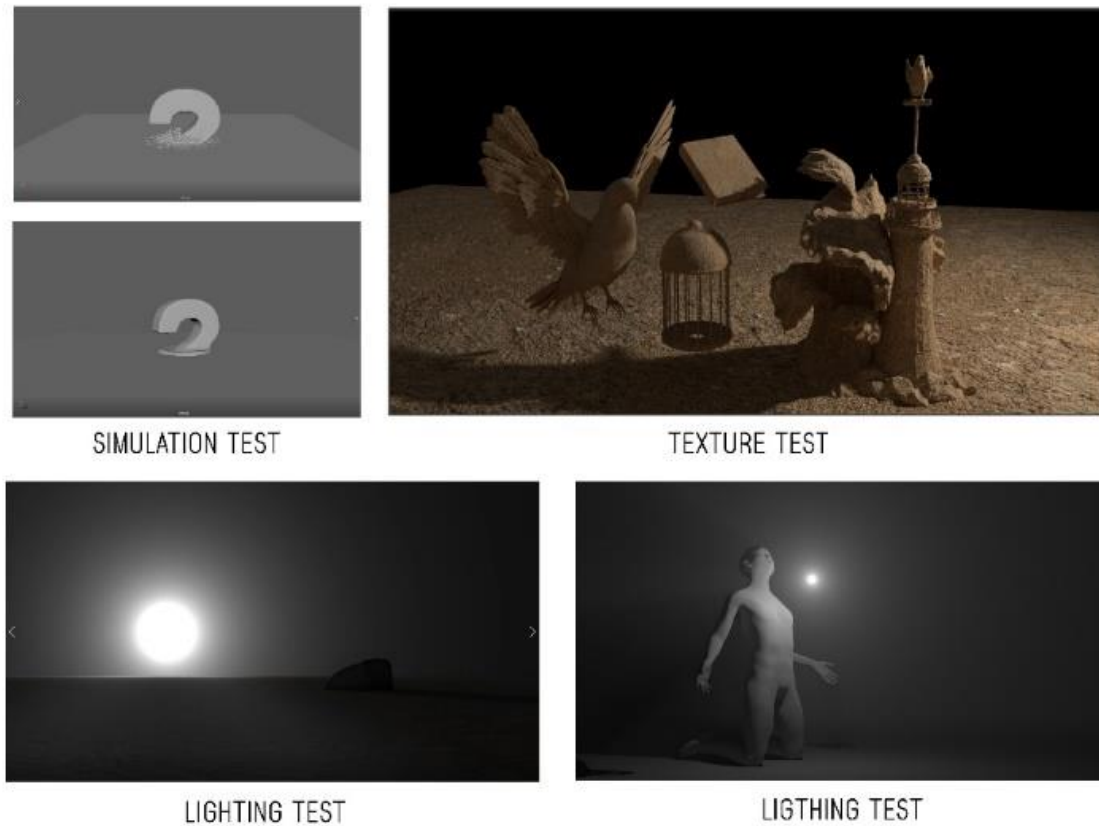


Figure 11. Haryadi, T. *Early pre-visualization and prototypes*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

These proofs of concepts help in determining whether the themes of my journey to faith are expressed effectively within the context of my sequence. This process also helps validate or invalidate my intentions on the artefact and gives me an informed direction on how I should improve my artefact (McElroy, 2016). While exploration of ideas is ongoing in this phase, the goal of this phase is to define a concrete visual plan of the final artefact (e.g. storyboard and rough cuts).

PHASE 3: REFINEMENT AND EVALUATION

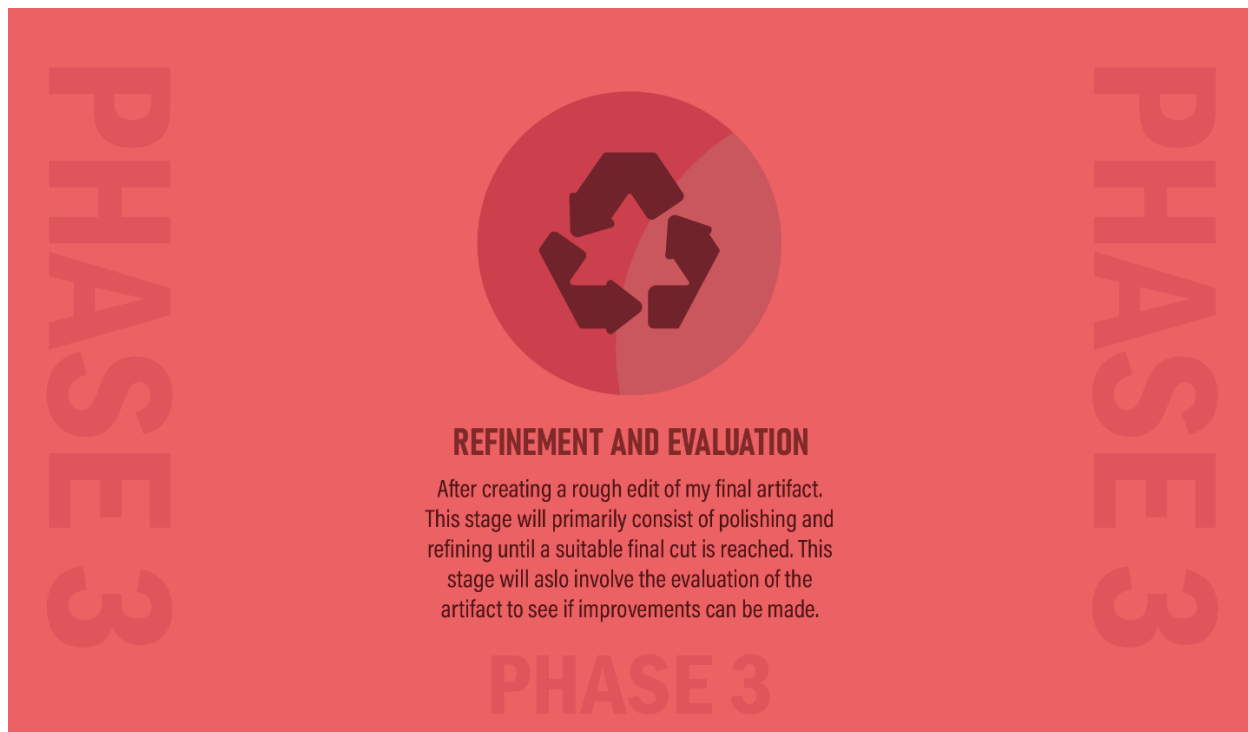


Figure 12. Haryadi, T. *Design Thinking influenced Action Research model Phase 3*. [Screenshot]. (2019)

The final stage of my research model is 'Refinement and Evaluation. This stage takes the visual plan I have constructed in the second phase and executes it into a final artefact. At this stage in the process, no more exploration is to be made, as this stage primarily focuses on executing and refining previously established plans until a final sequence is created. This stage also gives an opportunity to evaluate the research project and discern what can be improved for future endeavours. Feedback from colleagues and mentors are also welcomed, as outside perspectives can discern certain improvements I could not see on my own.

CONCLUSION

The use of a Design Thinking influenced Action Research model helps my research by establishing a critical and creative environment where I can reflect upon my journey to faith. This model allows me to explore my reflections using practice-based research methods that help inform the development of my artefact. This model also uses an autoethnographic methodology which helps me define clear themes from my faith journey and communicate them within my practice.

4. REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will be discussing two key concepts which have contributed to the development of the final artefact. These concepts are a 'hand-crafted' approach to practice and the importance of metaphor as a narrative tool.

HANDCRAFTED APPROACH TO PRACTICE

One important consideration I took when developing my artefact is adopting a 'hand-crafted' approach to practice. This method was inspired by Richard Sennett and his view on craftsmanship. Sennett defines craftsmanship as a mindset toward practice focused on the intimate connection between the craftsman and the work created, through labour and methodical practice. (Sennett, 2009). This mindset is pivotal within my research as my artefact draws heavy inspiration from my experience and by adopting this mindset, I am able to create a work fully reflective of who I am. In the context of my practice, I took this mindset aimed towards physical crafts and applied it within a virtual context. This meant using techniques and software which places artist participation as the main contributor to the outcomes of the practice rather than relying upon procedural algorithms to create them.

One stage in the development process where this was demonstrated was creating the final 3D sculpture for the final sequence. The method I was intending to use to produce the model was through a 3D modelling software called Autodesk Maya. However, this method proved to be too constricting: the modelling philosophy of Maya is systematic, which meant creative exploration is restricted when a certain stage is reached within this modelling pipeline. In order to maximize creative freedom, I decided to use another modelling software called ZBrush. I chose this tool because it possessed an iterative workflow that uses a modelling technique similar to traditional sculpting. Immediately after switching to ZBrush, I could see major improvements to the look of my sculpture. Using this new method, I was able to model my sculpture without worrying about the structure of the model itself, since I could adjust the model's proportions in real time more easily compared to modelling in Maya. Another benefit of using ZBrush is I can improve parts of my sculpture more iteratively.



Figure 13. Haryadi, T. *Sculpting process of my final sculpture*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

The figure above demonstrates this iterative process: instead of defining the dimensions from the start, I decided to form the sculpture iteratively (Figure 11). By modelling my sculpture in this way, I'm able to have creative and precise control over every feature. As a result, the sculpture feels more organic and emulates this hand-crafted impression. This method is also reflective of the narrative of my sequence, as the story involves the sculpture organically forming from the ground.

This virtual hand-craft approach enables me to be intimate within the development of my artifact and more intentional when making design decisions. This connection also allows me to be more vigilant when it comes to discovering potential issues and resolve them with better precision. Overall, this approach is significant in creating a work truly tailored to the artist's intention, as clarity and precision are significant qualities to acquire in order to effectively communicate deeply personal experiences.

METAPHOR AS A NARRATIVE TOOL

Journey to Faith draws narrative considerations from biblical literature and my own experiences with Christianity. This section discusses how those references have translated to meaningful visualizations through the use of metaphorical imagery. Kovecses and Benczes' study on the concept of metaphor was pivotal in the artefact's development, as it informed me how to express complex themes through easily discernible domains (Kovecses & Benczes, 2010). One method which helped me to achieve this idea was to anchor abstract concepts into something physical and tangible. This idea is demonstrated through the form of the main sculpture. Each section of the sculpture is made of familiar objects, which express an emotional theme from my faith journey. By associating my experiences to something familiar, I am able to establish a natural and rational foundation for the comprehension of my themes (Kovecses & Benczes, 2010).

In the next several sections I will discuss how I have demonstrated this method through the three narrative arcs of my sequence. The narrative of *Journey to Faith* follows the creation of a humanoid clay sculpture. The story is separated into three acts, with each act exploring one of the three significant themes of my journey to faith.

ACT 1: Meaning



Figure 14. Haryadi, T. *Act One – Meaning*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

This section is heavily inspired by the creation story found in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, which explores meaning through the biblical story of how God intended to create man in his own image to rule over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28 New International Version). In light of this story, the main theme I wanted to convey was the sense of purpose I felt in knowing I have a divine purpose and an active role within it. Initial ideation sketches of this concept took inspiration from objects that expressed functionality (Figure 14), such as keys and instruments, in order to express a feeling of a designed purpose. However, this concept was too constricted in its interpretation, as it presented the feeling of purpose as one dimensional and did not address the participatory aspect of having an active role within that purpose.

ACT 2: Doubt



Figure 16. Haryadi, T. *Act Two – Doubt*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

An aspect from my experience with doubt that I wanted to convey is the way doubt consumed my mind as I sought for validation regarding my faith, fluctuating between a state of acceptance and disbelief. This act also takes biblical inspiration from the first chapter of the Book of James, where the Bible describes doubt as a wave tossed and turned by the wind (James 1:6 New International Version).

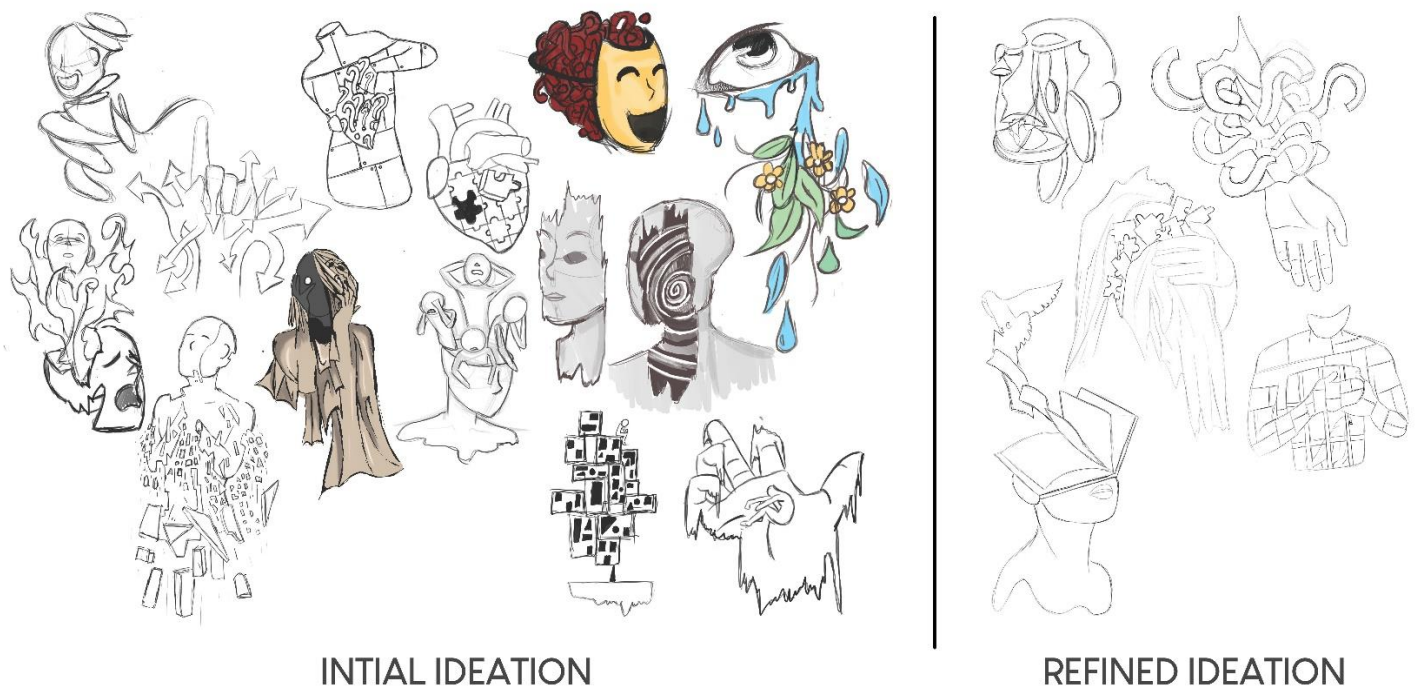


Figure 17. Haryadi, T. *Ideation sketches on the concept of doubt*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

Reflecting on these two contexts, my ideation sketches focused on exploring the concept of unrest, looking at erratic forms to highlight the volatile nature of doubt. While this concept served as a suitable visual metaphor, it lacked the depth and nuance I needed to portray my particular experience with doubt. With this in mind, I took a different approach to describing this volatility by portraying doubt as a parasite consuming the body of its host. Through several iterations of this concept, I decided upon the image of books and question marks to convey this idea. I chose to use these objects because they symbolized the knowledge I tried to cover my doubts with, and how that same knowledge became a catalyst to a vicious cycle of discovery and suspicion until it ultimately consumed my mind.

ACT 3: Love

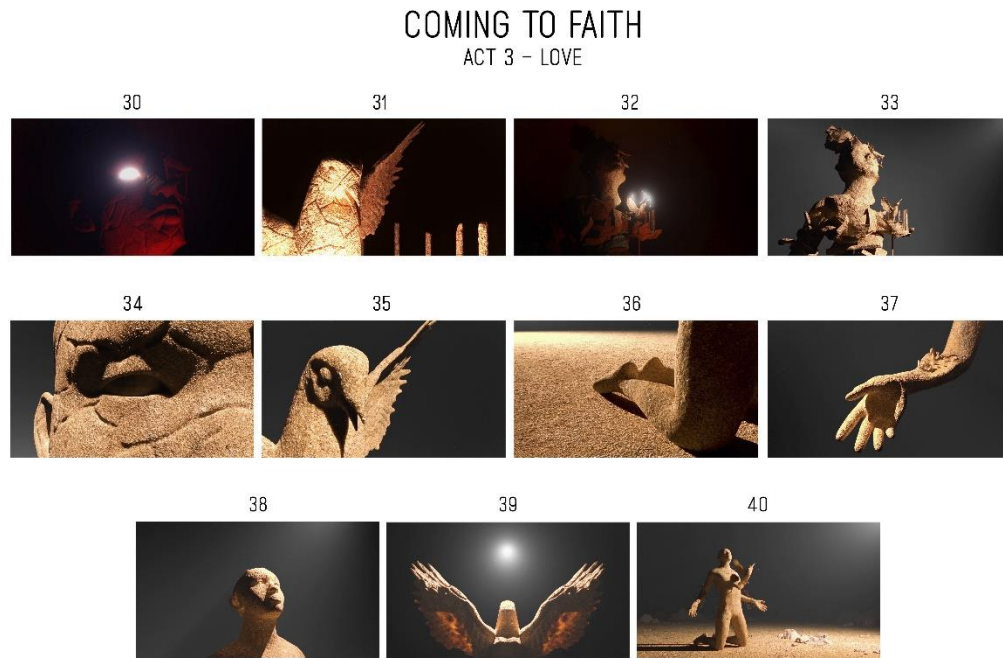


Figure 18. Haryadi, T. *Act Three – Love*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

This act conveyed the idea of God's love and how that has influenced me to finally accept Christianity as my fundamental worldview. The feeling I wanted to communicate through this act was the sense of comfort I felt in knowing that God was growing and caring for me through every step of this journey. This act was the most challenging in terms of translating my experience into something clear in its interpretation. This is because the core themes of this act take heavy inspiration from theological concepts which require biblical context in order to understand. This difficulty was evident when I tried to explore the concept of God's love through ideation sketches, as these sketches were either too obscure or vague to be understood by the audience.

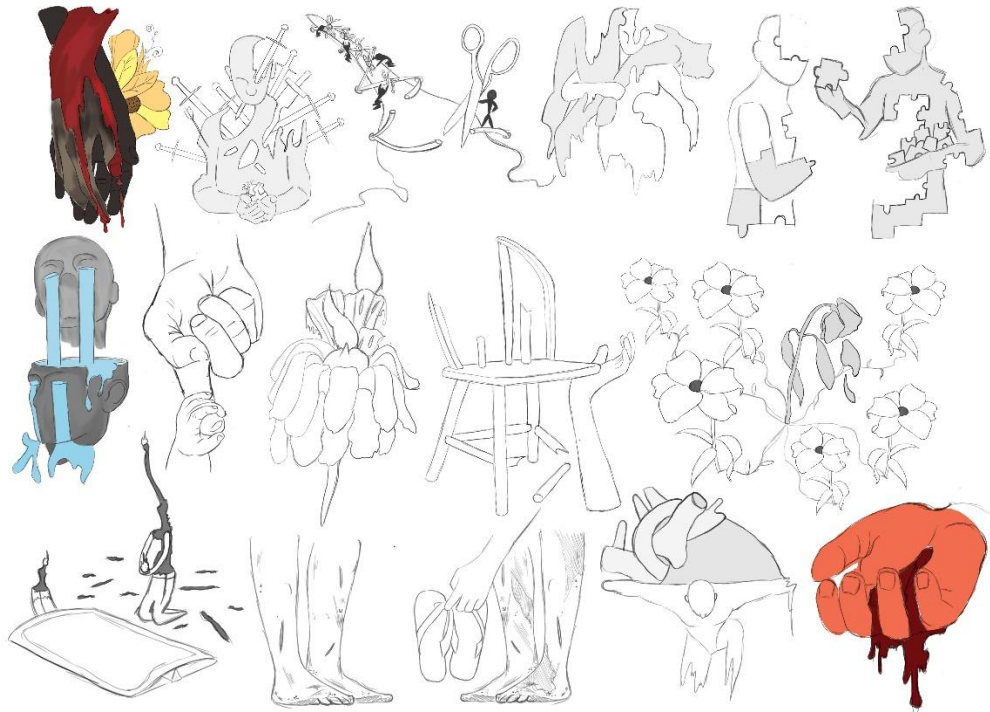


Figure 19. Haryadi, T. *Ideation Sketches on the concept of love*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

This meant I needed to take a different approach to conveying my personal relationship with God. The method I eventually decided upon was to express this theme was through a visual allegory. This idea is expressed through the presence of the light in my narrative. The light symbolized the presence of God in my narrative by how it set the events of my narrative in motion. The light demonstrates God's personal connection with me by how the light is present through every stage of the sculpture creation. The light also plays an active role in restoring the sculpture from crumbling through the help of the light's presence. This method also draws parallels to the forty-third chapter of the Book of Isaiah, which explores how God seeks to be an active participant in a person's life rather than just a passive observer (Isaiah 43:2 New International Version).

Through these examples, we can see that metaphor enables me to communicate personal themes in a visual language that can be interpreted by the viewer. As Terence Hawkes describes it, metaphor takes a meaning of one object and transfers them into another in order to heighten or achieve a more precise meaning (Hawkes, 1972). In the context of these examples, I have used this figurative language visually by transferring the core themes of my faith journey into tangible representation that condenses and emphasizes certain emotional attributes and communicates them to the viewer.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed two concepts that have contributed to the development of my final artefact. Firstly, I discussed how I have implemented a 'hand-crafted' approach to my practice through the use of software with iterative and labour-intensive workflows. By applying this approach to my practice, I have more creative control over every aspect of the artefact resulting in a more personal and reflexive work. Secondly, I have also explored the potential of metaphor as an effective narrative tool to translate complex themes into a meaningful visualization. This tool allows me to reflect upon my experience more closely by pushing me to define my thoughts through universal domains such as figures and objects. Expressing my thoughts in this way also allows me to view my journey from a more universal perspective, revealing new understandings about my faith and how that may look to audiences.

5. CONCLUSION

Journey to Faith is a creative exploration of my journey to the Christian faith. This research explored the potential of CGI/VFX as an effective medium to communicate deeply personal experiences. After undertaking this research, I have found that to effectively communicate these experiences, one must find a common visual language which serves as a mental bridge from the artist to viewer. In this exegesis, I discussed how visual metaphor may be the answer to this issue, and how I have explored this concept through CGI/VFX.

Through this exploration, I have discovered one of the biggest strengths of this medium lies in its ability to mix different visual styles to create new ways of seeing. However, I have also found this strength can also be its biggest downfall as having this level of flexibility can also run the risk of creating something too obscure for audiences to clearly interpret. With this in mind, one takeaway I have found helpful when solving this issue is the value of exploration through practice. This medium allows the artist to explore different avenues of visualization efficiently and by taking advantage of this freedom through constant experimentation, the artist will not only get a better understanding of his own thoughts through trial and error, but also how to better communicate these thoughts to the audience.

Another advantage this medium has in communicating abstract thought is its ability to create something fully reflexive of the artist. While the level of reflexivity can be somewhat dependent upon the tools the artist uses, I have found inserting myself both conceptually and technically into every stage in the development of the work enables the work to fully reflect my thoughts and feelings. This result was only possible through the flexibility CGI/VFX provides.

Reflecting upon the findings of this research, I would have liked to have spent more time exploring different avenues of visualization further within this medium. As previously stated, one strength this medium has over other forms of creative visualization is its ability to mix visual styles together. In light of this, one potential research plan I could enact in the future is to explore how other mediums such as painting and 2D animation could blend together with CGI/VFX to create a new visual style, and shed light on new methods of communicating deeply personal experience creatively.

The journey of spiritual transformation is a life-changing experience, and I have attempted to facilitate this experience within a visual medium which connects with audiences on a personal or even spiritual level. Ultimately, the artefact created is strictly interpretational and not a cemented representation of the Christian faith. The artefact lets audiences view Christianity from one deeply personal point of view and my hope is that audiences will come away from the experience with newfound perspectives around Christianity. The artefact does not aim to convert an individual to the Christian faith: its objective is to effectively express the experience of faith in a visual medium, giving form to complex thoughts in the hopes that it paints a clearer picture of what faith may look and feel like to a Christian.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Research Journal: Doubt

In this journal entry, I mainly focused on exploring the concept of doubt and how doubt contributes to an individual's journey to faith. During the creation of this journal entry, I looked at several secular and theological contexts, as well as the movie *Silence* to explore this topic. The material following this section is taken from the journal entry itself.

Critical Analysis:

"Even If God had been silent my whole life, to this very day, everything I do, everything I've done, speaks of Him. It was in the silence that I heard your voice"

(Scorsese, 2017)

This line from the film 'Silence' directed by Martin Scorsese drove me to analyse doubt and how it affects our interpretation of values and ethics. To put this quote into context, 'Silence' is a film that deconstructs the dogmas of Christianity to create a thought piece that asks the question: how far would you go to protect your faith, even if it means causing suffering to others? Cryptic and divisive among its audience, the film highlights the brokenness of humans, putting an emphasis on our stubbornness and pride in the face of danger. Through closer analysis, I realized the film also carries an interest in what faith is. The movie implies that to have faith is to doubt your faith.

Taking away the theological aspect of the concept, this idea of doubt in one's own belief can be found in Pier Benn's 2014 publication 'Commitment'. Benn argues that to commit to a certain belief, one must have doubt in order to keep one from heading into a distorted way of thinking (Benn, 2014). Viewing doubt in this way, I can start to see how Scorsese turned a movie that highlights faith into a character study on what it really means to have faith, as it is through releasing the extent of our own weakness that makes having faith in something, much more of an informed decision rather than a blind one.

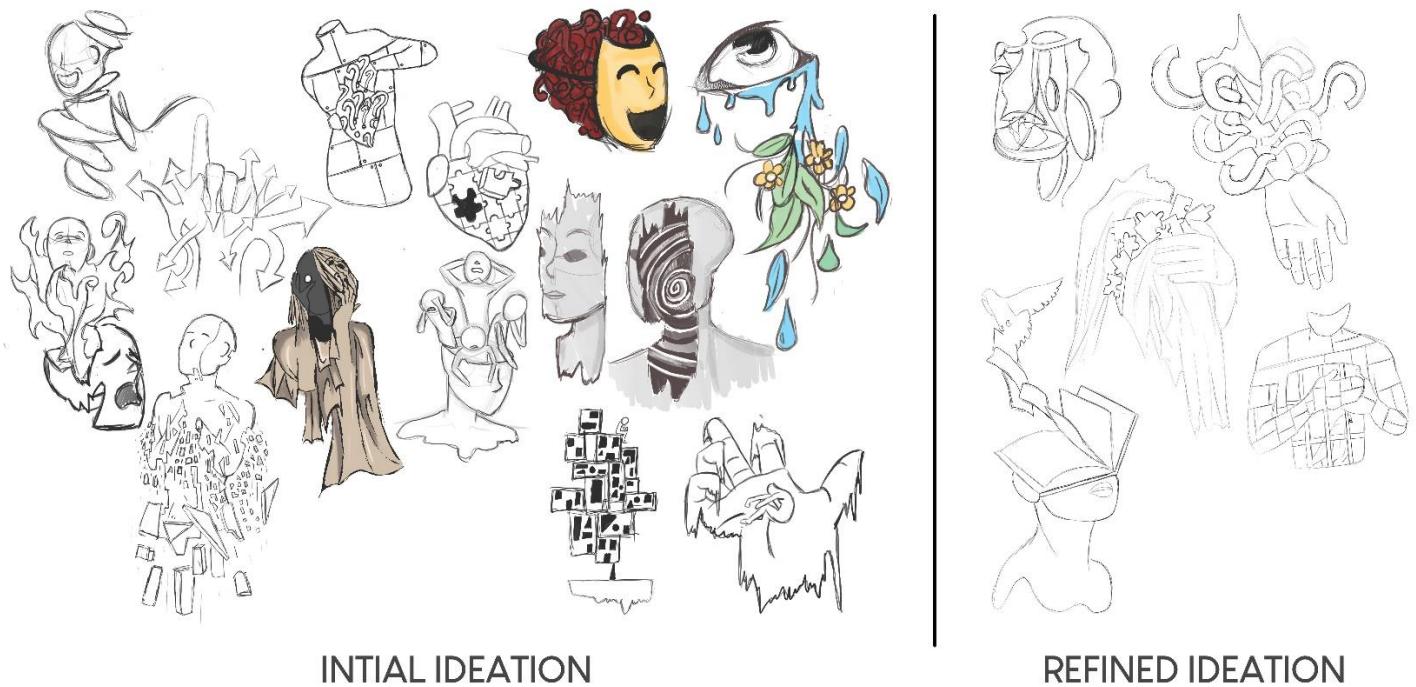


Figure 17. Haryadi, T. *Ideation sketches on the concept of doubt*. [Screenshot]. (2020)

Visual Reflection:

When trying to illustrate the concept of doubt in relation to faith, one of the key things I wanted to express is the willingness to doubt. The sketches express these ideas by illustrating subjects that 'uncover' themselves to see what they truly feel, because only then can they truly discover their faith. One of the more significant sketches is the sketch located at the very top left. This sketch involves an individual in a praying position while slowly disintegrating; the sketch emphasizes the idea that faith is built upon the constant battle with doubt, as doubt allows you to strengthen your faith. The importance of dependency and faith is also highlighted in the sketch: even if we crumble within our doubt, our genuine trust for our faith is what ultimately counts. This is illustrated by the praying posture the subject takes even if he is still crumbling from within.

Narrative Reflection:

I would always see doubt as something that represents weakness within a character, as it showcases the extent of a person's passion or drive within something. Because of this belief, I've always sought to be confident not only within myself but through the things I placed value in. But when it came to my journey with faith and my relationship with God, doubt became something hard to digest, due to how vulnerable I must be to realize how much doubt was present in my life. These doubts really impacted me mentally, as I started to question whether I believed in anything at all, but as I progressed later in my journey with faith I soon found it is the extent of these doubts that will ultimately become the source of my strength for my faith.

One of the significant events in this battle with doubt was when I fundraised for my Christian camp last year. Taking place in June, a major event in my university Christian movement, Student Life, was a camp where several university Christian movements come together for five days to learn more about Jesus. The entry fee was three hundred dollars, so a fundraiser was enacted to give those of us interested in learning about Jesus but financially struggling to attend the camp. At first glance, I was very sceptical as to whether I would be able to help raise enough money to help even one person get to the camp; to add to these worries, I was also struggling at the time to keep up with my own faith and was doubting whether God was really present in my life. These worries really irritated me and although I was reluctant at first, I eventually set aside my doubts and proceeded to do the fundraiser.

Through this fundraiser I learnt how to deal with doubt, and it was answered in a way that made me realize just how God shows up when you least expect Him. During those moments of fundraising I found overwhelming generosity within all sorts of people: individuals selfless enough to support me financially, even though they didn't necessarily agree with Christian practices, but still contributed under the sole reason of giving people an opportunity to experience new things. It was also during these moments that I was blessed enough to hear other people's testimonies, stories of their trials with faith and how they were able to overcome them. For the first time in my journey I was able to really feel God working through me and through His presence I was able to raise nine hundred dollars, to help send three people including myself to the camp later that year.