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Faculty of Fine Arts

Animation Department

Sustaining Enthusiasm in the Animated Medium

Master's Thesis by John F. Quirk

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Tallinn 2022**

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Abstract

Developing an independent animated film can often be an exercise in tedium, repetition, and sustaining one's enthusiasm across long stretches of time. In my time as a student, then an instructor, then a student again, I've come across so many people who suffer through the process of building their projects and struggle to maintain healthy working habits in doing so. I've conducted a series of interviews with animators at a variety of different levels of experience, and organized a survey of the animation community at large regarding this topic. My aim is to address the facets of the animation process that weigh us down, to offer methodologies and processes to combat these issues, and to share the experiences of my interviewees and survey participants to boost morale and promote healthier, more fruitful approaches to those who struggle in their process.

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PART 1- Art & Dogs

a. A word on “ART”

Art acts as an expression of our inner selves-- to express oneself, and share that expression, is to relate to one another, through means intellectual, emotional, physical. But this expression is not always a single word cried out, or a momentary blast of something visual. In the case of animation, the process of our expression can require a year, or two, or ten. So how do we preserve and sustain this expression, this passion, through the long, tedious process of animation, to bring our art to completion?

I, personally, have never felt that what I am making is *art*. In my mind, the short films I've made have always dwelled in a caveat to art; as *a funny little thing I'm putting together* rather than my *ART*. I don't believe art is too important a term for the great works brought about by animators, nor do I think that what I do is any less valid a form of creative expression, but I draw this line in order to dodge the title of *Artist*, as calling myself an *Artist* feels a bit pretentious when I consider my output to be *goofy little movies* and *silly little doodles*.

However, when it came to planning a film to suit a *Master's Thesis*, I decided that I needed to roll up my sleeves, put away childish things, and make *ART*. The history and pedigree of EKA, churning out breath-taking films by incredible animators, set a new bar-- I must make a *masterpiece* ! Two masterpieces, in fact, in just two years, then return to America, master's degree in hand, circulating my work *all over the world*!

It's no surprise that I'm here now, 4 years later, with a single film I feel little for, writing my thesis about losing inspiration, burning out, and researching how to avoid doing anything like that to myself, ever again. This grinding, loveless experience with building my thesis film, *Dogdogproblemdog*, is what led me to explore this topic. Every day, I would hopelessly slug into the studio like a bruised-and-bloodied welterweight, sheeping out of his corner for another round of punishment against a prizefighter.



A prizefighter dressed as a circus-dog, no less.

b. Dogdogproblem

Dogdogproblem is my animated short for my MA studies at EKA. The film is about a circus performer who is also a dog, and despite his resistance, ultimately gives into his animal instincts, destroys the circus in a frenzy, is promptly removed, and swiftly replaced. *Dogdog* was made with stop-motion animation, on layers of glass, with plasticine and paper cutouts, with expressions digitally drawn in on top of the stop-motion sequences, and digitally composited together.

The core elements of the project arose from a class exercise with Priit Pärn-- We created pairs with built-in dramatic tension, then swapped one of these pairs with another student, and were tasked to build a story with what elements we are left with.

The elements I wound up with were,



DOG,



CHOCOLATE,



STINK,



and **CLOWN.**

The initial story, and its many early permutations, focused on the toxic relationship between a circus dog and a chocolate bar, disrupting the dog's concentration. Sometimes what we think we want is actually very bad for us. Deadly, even.

The forbidden fruit.

It's not common knowledge, I discovered, that chocolate is poisonous for dogs. I learned this lesson very young, when I shared some candy with my best friend, Joxer, causing him to have a terrible Halloween that year. A lack of this premise with the viewer made the toxicity of the relationship less clear; and I began to second-guess the central tension of the story. I opted to focus instead on the broader idea, being the struggle between one's professional self and one's animalistic instincts.



These shots in particular came with interesting challenges that I enjoyed tackling:



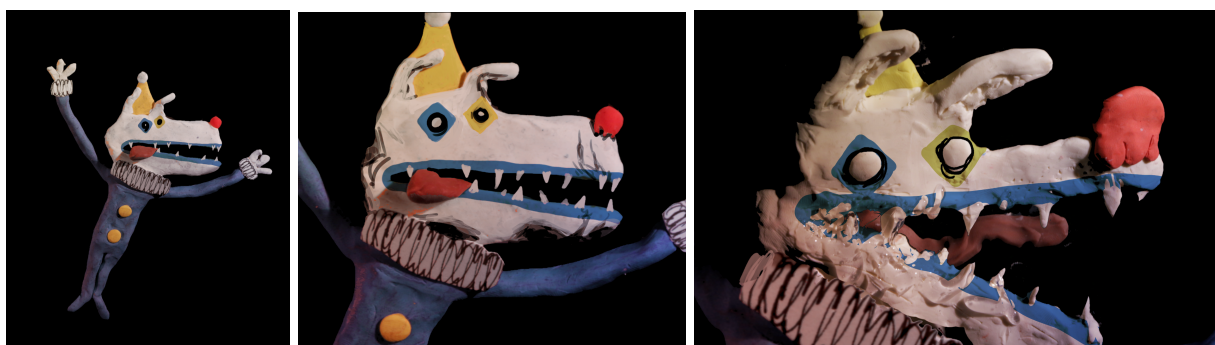
The clown was lit in this scene using matches to achieve the fire-flickering effect.



The only truly three-dimensional shot in the film, as the yellow clown turns after landing.



This sequence maintains a pacing that I really enjoyed working with.



Replacements and digital schmutz made this gross-up (like a close-up, but *gross*) work.

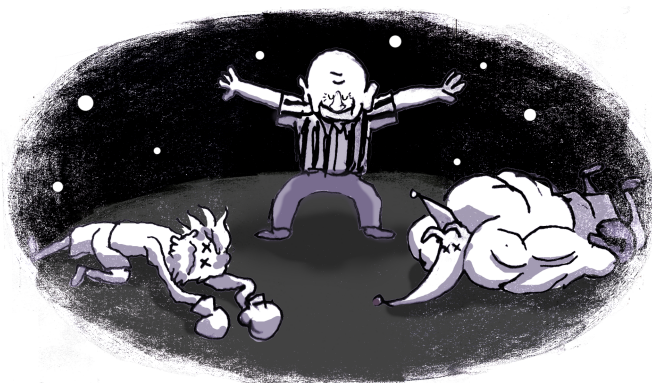
My joy, at this point, was found in building individual shots, but the timeline I was assembling from them was feeling like less than the sum of its parts. There was a long period between this phase and the film's final cut. I was proud of some of these tricky shots and compositions, and I was happy with the music composed for the film, but I found a great dissatisfaction with how it all came together. I felt as though I had lost out on the opportunity to make the *masterpiece* I somehow imagined this film could become, all those years ago, in those early, optimistic planning phases.

I followed the formula, I checked every box on my spreadsheet, I recreated the storyboard as faithfully as one could, yet I felt it *lacked*; it was slow, it was labored, and it wasn't adding up to something I felt proud of. But my visa, and subsequent academic leave time was running out. I was too discouraged to animate any more of this thing. It seemed it was time to throw in the towel in this brutal boxing match.

Dogdogsolutiondog

I was given a great piece of advice from Olga Pärn, maybe a year prior to completion, "*John! You must finish your dogs! Deciding that something is finished is one of the most important things for a director to do!*" In the end, knowing I may never be happy with this film, I knew it needed to be completed regardless. Getting into the final stages of editing, there was a burst of new energy. It was a tiny remark by Jonas Taul after showing him the cut at the time, who told me, "*I feel like it could maybe work as a children's film*", that colored my thinking brighter. When I showed this cut to The Pärns in a meeting, wherein their son Märt seemed to be the only one in the room to identify what was going on in the story, this cemented this audience in my mind. There was little to be done to make the film more like a short *specifically for kids* at this point, but I felt happy to know there was the possibility for an audience of *some kind*.

After whittling the piece down to give it a snappier pace and the sound designer giving it a fresh coat of paint, I still couldn't see the film as more than a collection of individual shots. I knew that it told a *story*, and it looked how I'd hoped it would, and all in all, after years of telling people it's "99% there!" I could finally tell them, "*it's over!*"



... in a rare double knock-out.

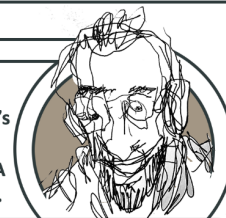
As I spoke to more and more of my study-mates and animator friends throughout my grueling saga of *dog problems*, I realized that I wasn't alone. For many, this slogging dip in enthusiasm is common at this 75, 85, 95% point in the development of long-term animation projects. This was not true for everyone— in some cases, I was met with a magnificent positivity about the filmmaking process. So it was time to investigate; are these people super-human? What faustian pact have they made to labor through their work with such an optimism?

I arranged to interview several directors and animators of vastly different experiences and approaches, at a variety of different professional levels and experiences; including a few of those who gave me words of encouragement; those who seemed to glide through their creative process like gulls over an ocean, as well as those who identified with my experience of slogging through this film's development like a swamp.



Anu-Laura Tuttelberg

Anu-Laura is an Estonian animator, director, sculptor, and educator. Her award-winning films include *Fly Mill*, *On the Other Side of the Woods*, and *Winter In The Rainforest*. While directing and animating her independent work, she also designs sets and puppets at Nukufilm studio. Anu-Laura and I met when I moved to Estonia for my studies, and her optimistic approach and the symbiotic relationship her work shares with the natural world lead me to reach out for an interview.



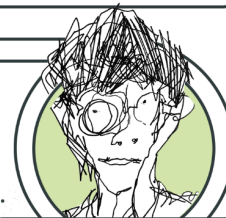
Bruno Quast

Bruno is an Italian-German animator whose knowledge of sound design and musical composition informs the cadence and dramaturgy of his work. One of my study-mates in EKA's animation master's program, we worked together often in the lockdown, boosting one-another's enthusiasm for our creative endeavors. Recently graduated, Bruno has hosted sound design workshops and talks at EKA and Harvard, as well as showing his thesis film *cufufu* and concurrent works at a variety of festivals.



Andy London

Andy is an American writer, director, animator, educator and co-founder of *London Squared*. He's been creating comics, films, art installations and animated content since 1992. Award-winning films include *Subway Salvation*, *The Backbrace*, and *Lost Tribes of New York City*. Andy and I taught together in 2019, and I wanted to get his unique take on education, the commercial world, and how he overcomes the stress and difficulty that comes with our shared artform.



Atsushi Wada

Atsushi Wada is a Japanese director and producer, known for his award-winning films such as *The Great Rabbit*, *Bird in the Peninsula*, *The Mechanism of Spring*, and *In a Pig's Eye*. I knew Wada-san's work well prior to our interview, and I wanted to pick his brain about his distinct sense of timing, the relationship of sound and motion in his work, and his approach to creative block. I don't speak Japanese, but I was kindly provided payment for an interpreter to assist us with our interview.



Dan Kelly

Dan Kelly is an American freelance animator and motion graphic designer, recently dabbling in 3-D and experimental animation tools. Dan was someone whose work I came to know over Instagram, where he has consistently posted entries in his *Draw A Dog Tuesday* project, weekly, for roughly 12 years. The long-spanning, yet short-term, prolific nature of his GIF series made me want connect and ask him his views and methods on sustaining the interest and long-term projects.

Michaël is a Dutch animator, director and illustrator based in London. He won an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film for *Father and Daughter*, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature for *The Red Turtle*. Michaël was someone whom I only knew initially by his films, but he was recommended to me by my advisor, Ruth, for an interview. We connected on the relationship of music and animation, being honest with oneself, and communication through art.



Michaël Dudok de Wit



Belle Warutkomain

Belle is a Thai animator and educator with an art-based research background. After working as the head animator for production company *HUAGLOM* for four years, she continued to gather varied commercial and freelance experience, along with working as an animation educator. Belle and I studied together at EKA, and in our time in the program, bonded over mutual understandings and experiences in filmmaking, teaching, learning, and being strangers in a strange land.

Jonni is an American animator and director. In the last few years, Jonni has produced two self-funded feature-length animated films, *The Final Exit of the Disciples of Ascensia* and *Barber Westchester*, as well as a ten-episode series of shorts, *Secrets and Lies in a Town Full of Sinners*. I came to know Jonni's work through the online animation community, and upon realizing how remarkably prolific Jonni has been in such a short timespan, I sought out answers to how this drive has been maintained.



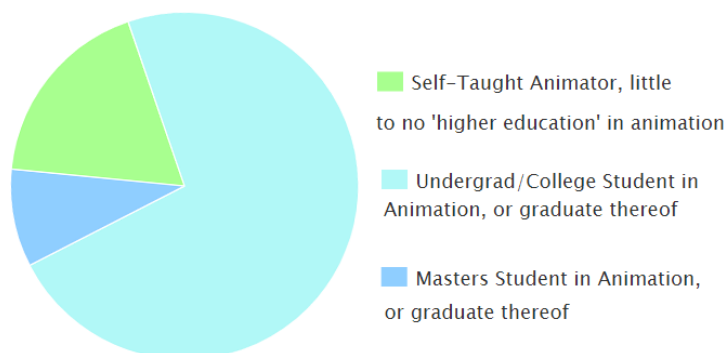
Jonni Phillips

The interviews are available separate from this document^[1-8]; and will be referenced along the way in quotations as they apply to each of the topics explored here. I do recommend reading the full interviews, as not every wisdom the interviewees expressed can be found in this text, but are still quite poignant and valuable— marvelous insights !

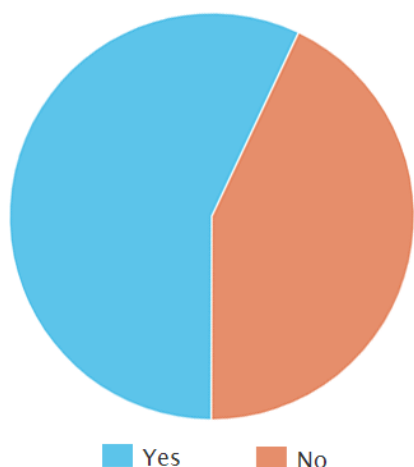
Along with the deeper experiences of these specific animators, I wanted to dig into some statistics. I put together a survey for anyone who has made an animated short before. This specific group, be they one-time-workshop-takers or life-long filmmakers, are valid in their experiences regardless of time spent in the medium. I believe this range allows greater relatability and visibility for those reading; and can regardless shed light that can aid us in our work to counteract our pitfalls relating to spark and burnout. All of these statistics reference the Survey for Animators^[9].

What educational experience best describes you?

To get a sense of who we are hearing from, I asked the survey-takers to identify their education experiences with animation. A great majority of our survey-takers are students or graduates of some kind of animation undergrad program.

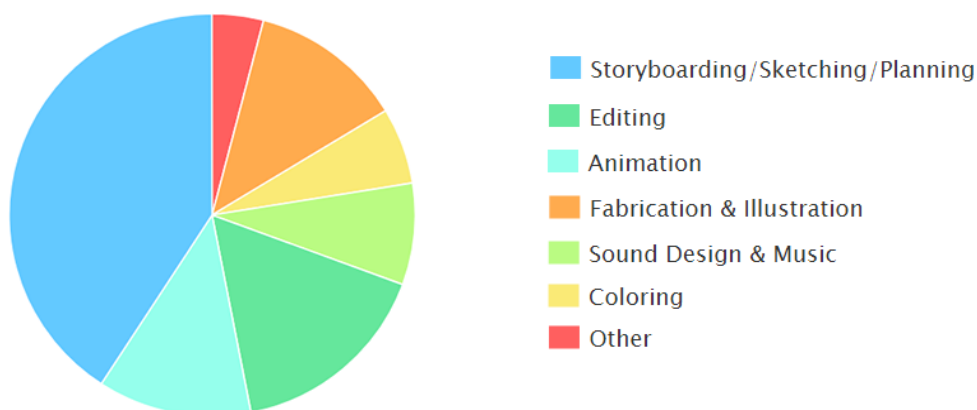


Do you work in an animation/editing/graphic/media-related job?



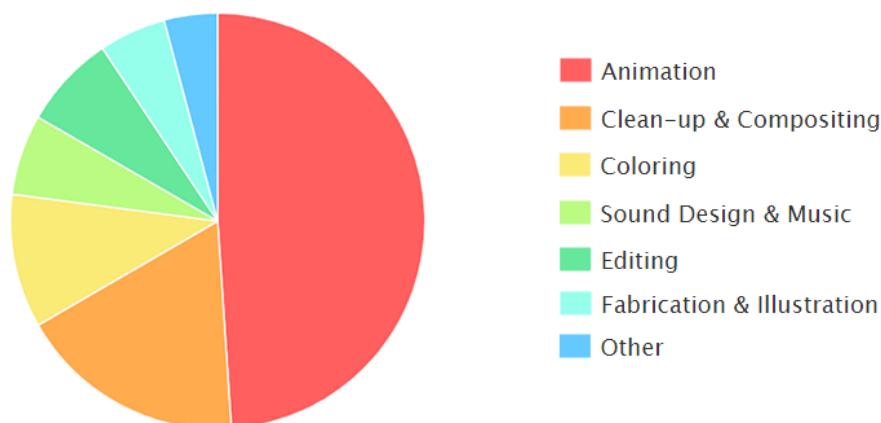
I was also curious about the survey-takers' experiences with working in animation— nearly 60% of these survey-takers currently some kind of job relating to animation, or another sort of job that requires skills that fold into the process of making an animated film, from editing, to motion graphics, to general media work.

What step in making an animated short do you enjoy the *most*?



From nearly 80 responses on the survey, there was a large percentage in favor of the Development phase of a project— storyboarding, sketching, planning the whole thing out, with the Editing and Animation phases coming in second and third, with Fabrication and Illustration just behind Animation.

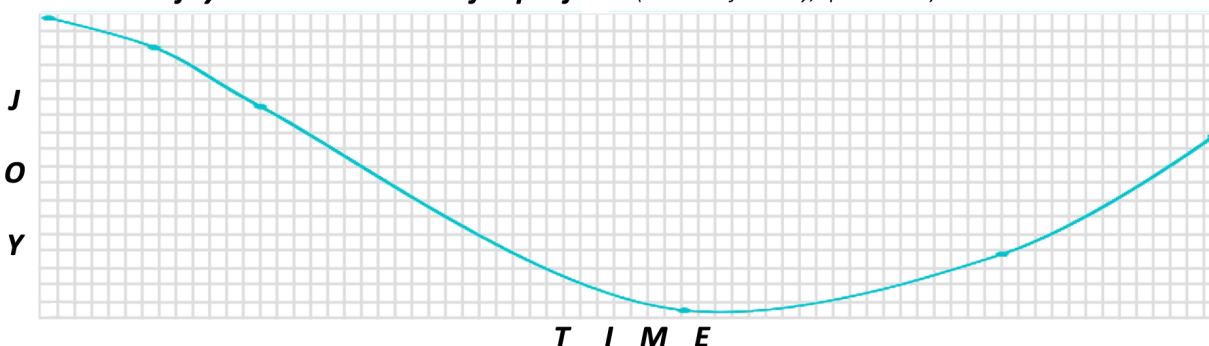
What step in making an animated short do you enjoy the *least*?



Curiously, the least-enjoyed part of the process was, by a wide margin, *animation itself*. The often monotonous tasks of Clean-Up and Color Work trail behind.

It seems that our work's very beginnings and our very endings see the most enjoyment, while our center, the meat and potatoes of the process, *the actual animating*, dips in enthusiasm for many. I compiled the data of the two questions from the survey regarding most-enjoyed and least-enjoyed facets of the process of making an animated short, and arranged them onto a timeline, where these points are commonly relevant in the process of making a short film.

Animator's joy over the course of a project. (results of Survey, question 7)



The result gives us a visualization of what I've come to call **The Animator's Dip**-- A steep, downward curve that one can easily sink into once production begins, after the honeymoon phase of planning and dreaming is over, when all of the elements of burnout are at their most prevalent. The relationship seen in the graph above looks strangely familiar-- as my eyes scan this line, as it curves lower and lower, I flash back to the brutal pummeling that dog-clown gave me for years in the studio.

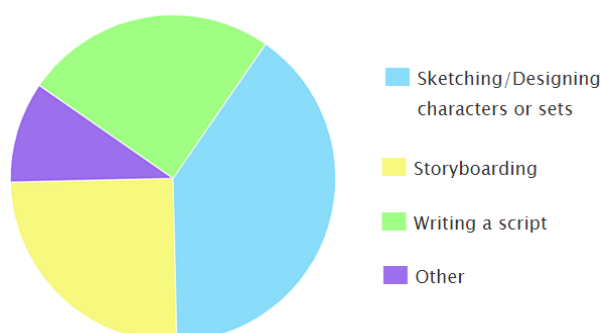


"It is easy to plan a film, but it's very different, and often very difficult to go through with it."

-Anu-Laura

It's no wonder the planning stage is attractive to us dreamers of dreams, as it is a playground of possibilities, as well as a safe stage, where nothing is yet *carved into stone*. This is a place where projects can thrive, flourish, if given the time and freedom to do so.

What is your first step in beginning an animated short film project?



Unsurprisingly, the survey shows that many see their first steps in sketching, character and set designing, followed by writing a script, which is nearly tied with storyboarding. Some other first steps include building mood boards, making shot-lists, and doing rough animation tests, but these pale in comparison to sketching and designing's ranking.

"There's the incubation period, which I think is highly precious for all artists. An animated film can't just go, snap, *like that* !

**Unless it happens this way for you, of course.
On a personal project, purely self-expression, if you don't have the necessary incubation period for the idea, whether it's a week or years, your project may reflect this."**

-Michaël



It's a delicate balance, to know when to keep incubating, and when to begin *laying your golden egg*, as Michaël describes it. This incubation phase can give a project the chance to grow, but it can bloat, or under deadline or pressure. The possibilities being endless while the expectations are high makes for a dangerous chemistry; as a project can bloat into what can feel like some unmanageable, undefined pile.

More sinister, perhaps, than a project becoming a mess of uncertainty, is a project developing into a razor-sharp icon of clarity in one's mind. Animator beware, as this stage may cultivate the manifestation of what I call the **Golden Calf Draft**, a perfect version of your film as it could be, if budget and deadlines weren't factors-- A false idol for the animator to worship; a flawless cut that can exist solely in one's mind.

Why try to render this pure vision into the harsh material world, when it exists perfectly in my mind?

Can one carve Dionysus from mere stone ?



"You've got to pull your head out of your ass."

-Andy

Once you have done so, please refer to Part 2, section 3, On *Perfectionism*.

The phrase *burn-out* somewhat poetically conveys that there was once a fire, excitedly flickering and glowing, that has since diminished. Despite burn out being a catch all phrase for this, there are a number of elements that can put this fire out. There are those that affect our long-term investment, as well as others which betray our moment- to-moment attention. So what are these bothersome things that keep us from moving ahead with our work? Let's discuss.

PART 2 - Causes of Burnout

a. Self- Doubt

Oh, *doubt!* One of the greatest acts of self-sabotage we can know. One of the easiest of creative blocks to stumble upon is to doubt oneself in the midst of a long-term project, especially for budding animators. We change, we grow, we get new ideas constantly— sometimes that storyboard, that shot, or that moment you thought would be so *cool* a few months ago can feel a bit less exciting *now*. This doubt can relate to your past-self and their ideas, but also to your present-self, cluttering their inability to *carry out* those ideas.

"When it comes to long-term narrative projects, I tend to lose the spark during pre-production. I begin to doubt the story or worry about the schedule as soon as I start mapping things out. The adrenaline that fueled the initial burst of creative energy gets swapped for anxiety."

-Dan



Doubt can reduce us to a state of stagnation. Many survey takers describe doubting oneself to be a primary factor in what uncouples them from a project, sometimes to the point of abandoning the thing entirely, as can many of these other facets of burn-out. The survey gave a few accounts on doubt's effect on the output and persistence of the participant's work.



"I haven't figured out how to get over burnout. i feel like in a lot of my assignments, i start to doubt my idea or my ability to make my idea look or feel how i want it to. i've given up on finsihing a lot of projects because it just isn't feeling right."



Even in the short term, I've had students who will crumple up or delete a nearly-finished sequence they made only moments ago, simply because they didn't think it was worth following through with. When we spoke, Anu-Laura and I connected on the struggles of ambition and doubt that we often find our students wrestle with.



"It's not uncommon to doubt that idea that you had three years ago. And remember, it may seem *naïve* or *boring* or *whatever* to *you*, because you've already had the idea, and you're ready to have *new ideas*."

For now, you need to trust that for some people, it will be an important idea to meet! Once you've finished your film, other people can hear this idea that you had three years ago."

-Anu-Laura

b. Expectations

**"In Japan, failure is seen as the biggest sin.
And in the States, success is like God."**

-Michaël



Another source of stagnation is the pernicious influence of perceived expectations; believing we need to meet some *golden standard*, whether it be one of ourselves, our contemporaries, our institution, or otherwise. Make a *"festival film"*, get a great studio job right out of school, win all the awards, wrestle Kaspar Jancis on the lawn outside of a screening. Naturally, these are things we all want, *of course*, but the pressure that exerts itself on us to *achieve them* can work against us in our journey toward those achievements. When Andy and I spoke, he shared with me his recent experience of what he described as a *total breakdown*...



"My whole system was just a mess. It went to my head, and I wasn't sleeping, and was just nauseous and disgusting, 24/7, and I couldn't function. I literally couldn't do anything. It was so bad that I actually took a medical leave and everything. I would take crazy-long walks, like four or five hours, and listen to a book on tape. And even *that* was a challenge at first, because I was so like, *in the hole* that I couldn't get past my own thoughts. It was hard to just like, *listen to something*."

-Andy

The more we talked, the more clear it was that Andy's obsessive need to *be creative all of the time* was something of a survival instinct, to live up to some great expectations he had set for himself, working in *absolute overdrive*. This instinct had begun to work against him, and completely hijacked his peace of mind. After a couple months of being *in the hole*, as he describes, he started to see a light from above...

"I realized, like, *Who am I still proving myself to?* It's *bullshit!* I think understanding that was very healthy, but I had to have a full-on meltdown to figure that out !"

-Andy



Expectations, whether grounded in realism or completely imaginary, instill an oft-unproductive sense in us that we *aren't quite there yet*, despite doing our best. This feeling can affect us at a small scale, when working through a single sequence of a project, or harangue us on a far larger scale, in the scope of one's entire *career*. When Belle and I began our conversation, she was careful to label herself a director, a term considered to carry something of an honorific weight to it.



"I would rather not call myself a *director* yet, until I've finished my master's film. Those small projects that I've done for fun, they're not at the level that I could call myself a director."

-Belle

Something that Michaël touched on, beyond the scope of the tiny circle of short-format animation, was the larger professional world's thinking that short film, as a format, is *child's play*, that it's just a stepping-stone to something "legitimate", i.e. something more commercially viable, such as directing feature-length films or animated series.

"Many people had told me, early in my career, they're very nice, your short films, and so on, but when are you going to make (real) films?"

They don't realize, I think short films are amongst the highest arts to have ever existed !"

-Michaël



With so many kings to impress and dragons to slay before we earn this imagined respect, is it any wonder why a knight goes freelancing? These expectations we accrue for ourselves can be diffused by simply recognizing that kings are just people wearing funny hats, and that dragons, in fact, *do not exist*. Not every project you make needs to be your greatest achievement, and is often just a stepping stone. This is true in the realm of personal work, as well as that of commercial work.



Compromising on what you think would likely make a better piece is something that you have to learn to be OK with. You don't have to put every commissioned job on your reel.

-Dan

Just laying down the stepping stone is enough of a task, but it can be an enjoyable one! There are already so many external factors that can lead us astray, as we will explore, so our inner pressures that gum up our works and shut us down must be mitigated.



"It really puts a lot of pressure on you if you're trying to fit somewhere. It's easier to do something that you enjoy doing, and just hope that somebody will enjoy it! As Francesco says,

if one person finds something out of your film, it is a success."

-Anu-Laura



A special thank-you, and a hearty shout-out, to Mr. Francesco Rosso.

c. Perfectionism

Perfectionism can plague a production at any point, from the very early planning, to animation, to the very last frame of editing. While not necessarily a negative trait in a creator on its own, *unchecked* perfectionism is prone to lead us down long and bumpy roads of relentless and often unfulfilling work, especially in the realm of independent animation. Traits of perfectionism that can slip into anyone's process, not just those branded as *perfectionists*; and can come and go, task to task.



"I tend to flop when I'm trying to make something perfect. I get really obsessive, and I just keep on going back onto the same panel and over the same lines over and over again."

-Andy

Michaël spoke of Richard Williams, whose film *The Thief and The Cobbler*, famously riddled with complication and studio interference, he describes as an abortion— The film was in production for nearly three decades with Williams, by all accounts, pushing for greater intricacy and absolute seamlessness in the sequences. Eventually, the film was pulled away from him by the production company, who, for the sake of time and budget, made changes and additions, with markedly less-impressive animated segments to fill in what was missing in Williams' story by that stage.

" So when I look at these works, I see the example of work by a perfectionist, and *look at the result*. It could be completed, and made into an incredibly successful film, but this holds them back. "

-Michaël



Michaël also made reference to Yuri Norstein, one of the *true masters of short filmmaking*, in his words. Michaël had the opportunity to meet Norstein years ago, and get a look at some of the sequences from his current project, *The Overcoat*, one that has lasted him decades. Norstein is known among friends as "The Golden Snail", for his talent, his persistence and his relentless perfectionism.

Perfectionism can sometimes be related to one's sense of self; stemming from a desire to be seen as one who *doesn't make anything unpolished*. Critique can be a frightening prospect for some perfectionists, as this process airs out what they might see as their *shameful unmentionables* to those they aim to impress in the first place, especially for students. Many survey takers, when asked how they avoid creative block, brought up a regular exercise of showing and discussing their work with friends or studymates.



"I usually like having people look at a project to make sure it makes sense to someone who isn't me, and to also let me know if there's anything I've missed, be it through technique or storytelling. The person looking at it doesn't have to be in the business of production. Sometimes that works better. I like having both though (Someone who works in production and someone who doesn't)."



d. Fatigue & Disconnection



"Don't get me wrong, I love making films, but I mean, it's like pushing a peanut across the country with your nose."

-Andy

There's a built-in rigorousness to the process of animation, there's no getting around this. The tedious nature of constructing an animated project is what calls in these other contributors to burn-out to appear, but sometimes what comes over us is nothing more complex than a *pure and overwhelming exhaustion*.

"When animating for myself, and it's not an easy thing that I can do quickly, and it's a rigorous process, putting in the work, and feeling like it's never going to end. This is when I feel most tired."

-Wada-san



"Your vision to complete a film is the only thing that motivates you, but in the moment itself, it's *heavy going*. Luckily, from experience, I know that it's just something to tolerate, you'll go through it. Don't panic."

-Michaël

Anu-Laura highlighted a very relatable manifestation of this fatigue, the feeling of simply *not wanting to get out of bed*, not having the willpower to push yourself to get to what you need to do. I think her perspective here, metaphor included, deserves even greater consideration; as someone who gets into many of her shoots before dawn, and literally stands out in freezing water to animate segments of her work...

"I really like winter swimming, but personally, I don't like that first moment. It's too much *shock!* for your body. It's not pleasant. It's thrilling, but it's not pleasant."

But what is really enjoyable is the feeling that you get when you come out of the water. Your body creates a lot of energy and heat from this dip, from going to the cold water, and coming out. It's like a *restart for your day*, you have so much energy, and you feel so well in your body, and you feel connected to the nature, and to *life!*
It's very enjoyable. So I'd like to compare it with that;

Okay. It feels horrible right now. I may have to get up from this warm bed. But later, I will feel joy, that feeling of achievement!
And I know that I'll be feeling better about myself, knowing that I had a shooting day-- *I'm making my film, and I'm one step closer to finishing my film, rather than I just slept this day, and gave in to laziness!*"

-Anu-Laura



e. What Life Throws At You

This little aside is here to remind us that we aren't machines, with glitches and bugs like Doubt and Fatigue in our systems, but in fact, people, living lives that are often chaotic and strange. As we observed with Andy's recollection of his stress-induced difficulties, we have to accept and make space for what life can throw at us, internal and external. When we are self-funded, without deadlines, life tends to take us, like a tragically slow moving river, away from what we want to do.

"I frequently see people who had no pressure at all, who would work in their free time on their projects while they're working commercially elsewhere. And years go by and they don't make that film, and that's quite common."

-Michaël



As our lives go through changes, finding ourselves with new responsibilities, obligations and trials, we must recognize and give room to these changes, especially when our financial well-being is at hand. More often than not, we unfortunately cannot survive this life by being *artists* alone. Belle brought up a very salient issue of art-making as a practice, especially for students;



"Having a secure amount of finance, so you don't have to worry, this can be really important... If you know that you won't run out of money, I think it's very easy to keep up with your work, but if you feel like you have to do freelance or other work to be able to finance yourself, I think that can drag you off of your film, very quickly."

-Belle

This conversation brought to mind the notion that art-making is a privilege; to be at a point where, financially and mentally, you can ease your mind to express itself, or even to *stay in your house*, let alone a *studio space*, for another month while building something personal, like a short film, for example. The economics of the arts world are very different country to country; and as Belle and I spoke, we reflected on the lack of funding that our countries, being the U.S. and Thailand, have for non-commercial short films, animated or otherwise. Belle as a teacher, similar to myself, is careful about our discussions with our students about the possibilities for their short-filmmaking aspirations in the economies of our respective countries.

"So, it's something that I want to encourage my students to do, but at the same time, I also have to be realistic that in Thailand, it's hard for them to find this work, so I push them to go out of the country if they want to do it."

-Belle



f. A Word On Animation Academia

While I don't pin failures or complications of student's films on the institutions that bore them, I do want to address some of the issues surrounding the higher education system's strictures in relation to the animation process—



"Success isn't necessarily making a perfect film, because then when you're actually in the real world, without a teacher behind you telling you what to do. You're not gonna make it, and *you're gonna have a nervous breakdown*, because you've never actually had to be creative; technically, singularly creative.

-Andy

Throughout a typical semester in my practice as an instructor, the moldable minds of budding animators are shown work that the professor has selected to exemplify *good animation*, *good films*, and generally, *good art*. Exposing new animators to worlds outside of Disney, Ghibli, and the cartoons they grew up with, especially in a technical, material sense, is, I believe, vital to a new animator's understanding and scope of the medium's possibilities. An important footnote one should find at the end of presentations such as these is that often this work has taken *many years*, and many many people to construct. While showcasing the history of the medium's evolution through the short-film format, I believe that it's just as valuable if not more so to showcase the work of current, radical filmmakers, of students and recent graduates, short-term jam and 24-hour challenge projects, and of underfunded, or self-funded creators.

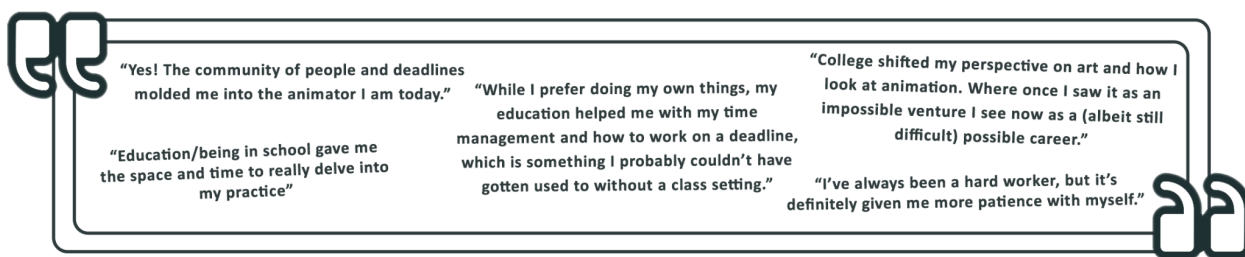
The space for discussing great works of the past is a valuable one, but *too narrow* a selection can tint a student's scope of what they ought to be making— many people I've known have found themselves making work that *their professor or advisor would like*, and I've experienced this myself as an instructor. Maybe even more difficult is having a professor whose work you deeply respect, and molding your project to fit into something they would approve of, or even something that they might *make*.

"It was the feeling of expectation, this, *forcing the film to be something narrative*, almost in Priit Pärn's style in a way, which I am not really so good at. *But it made nice material along the way !"*

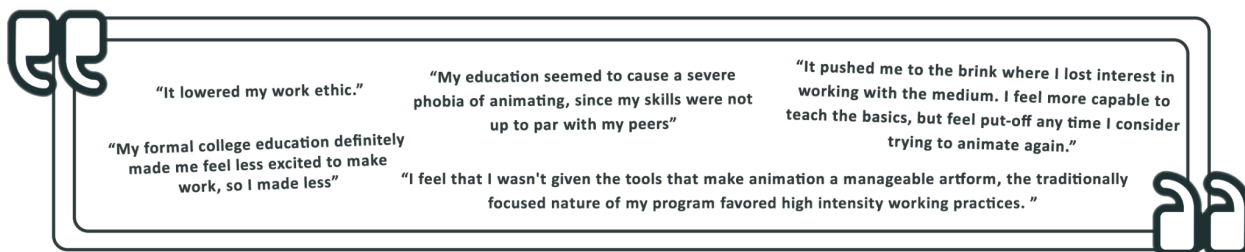
-Bruno



I write this not as a condemnation of hiring legendary filmmakers to teach animation, but more as a warning to young students who are aiming to carve a path for themselves and find their creative voice. As a student, I have always found an encouraging thought to be the consideration that you're *paying for this!* If not with money, at the very least with time. This time isn't time to do what you're comfortable with, or impress others, it's first and foremost to learn and experiment.

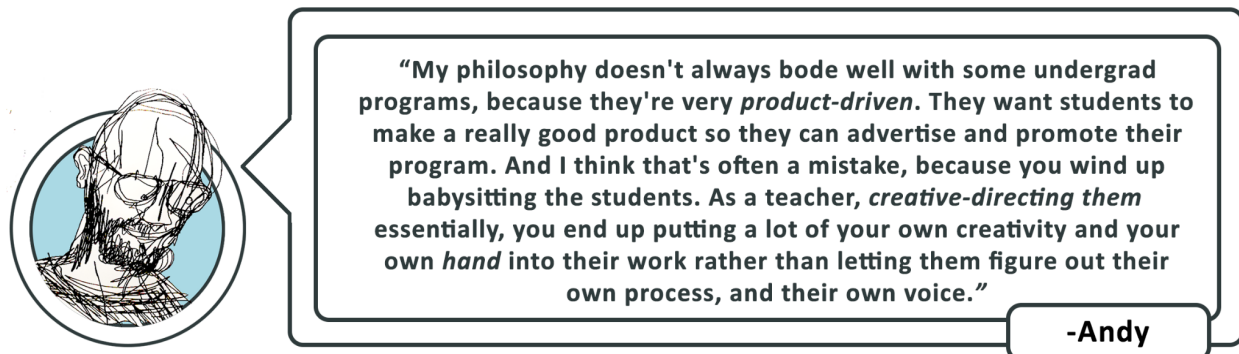


At its best, education can be a flaying of one’s inhibitions, a series of successful failures, and a perilous but rewarding journey of self-discovery.



At its *worst*, it can be like bumping into a beehive, and being stung by a swarm of comically-large hornets, with labels such as *DOUBT* and *FATIGUE* branding them like an overt political cartoon. Then going into debt, after being charged thousands of dollars for the experience. The hornets may also contact you a few months afterwards, asking for a donation to their hive.

Finally, and not unrelated to the previous thought, it’s important to consider what your institution might want from *you*. In some institutions, it’s not enough to give them your money and time, sometimes they ask for what can feel like a piece of your *soul*. Andy and I discussed our experiences with the more *product-focused* angle of many universities, whose aim can sometimes be more toward good press than providing valuable experiences of experimentation and failing forward. I’ve been lucky enough to not work in a university where I’d be expected to chastise a student for making bold creative choices, but they are out there.



As students, I believe we are most prone to the causes of burnout detailed above, and most in need of the practices detailed ahead.

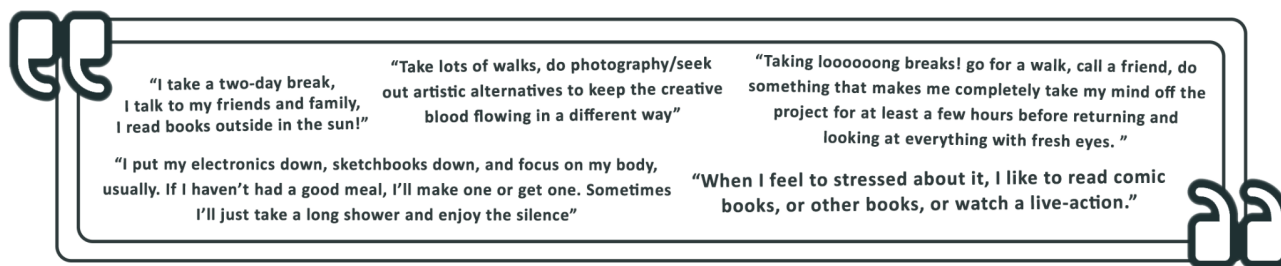
Let us crawl our way out of these depths.

PART 3: Best Practices

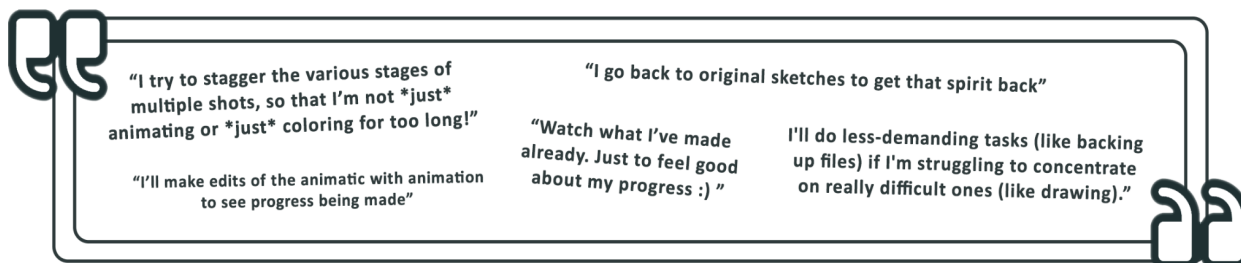
a. An Introduction To Best Practices

We have descended to the deepest depths of an animator's four greatest pitfalls. Certainly, other things can plague our process; depression, illness; sometimes it's just a matter of getting distracted with everything else that life throws at us. For these issues and more, let us now begin our ascent to a *successful filmmaking practice* !

The survey showed some interesting results regarding how people have learned to get through feeling creatively stuck, as did many of my interview subjects. A few distinct varieties of solutions emerged among these responses,



The most common category of solutions was doing **something completely unrelated** to the project, to relax and enjoy oneself, *unburdened by artistic pursuit*. The length of this break time varied greatly between responses, anywhere from a couple of hours to weeks and weeks. Another common response to ease the stresses of creative burnout was to **move forward with a different element of the project at hand**.



“When I quit my job to work on *Barber Westchester*, I found myself completely creatively blocked on the project and couldn't think of anything, which was terrifying. Instead of meandering around until inspiration struck, I decided to make *Secrets and Lies in a Town of Sinners*- the idea being that I would gradually worldbuild *Barber's* world so that I would have more ideas when I actually started the movie.”

-Jonni

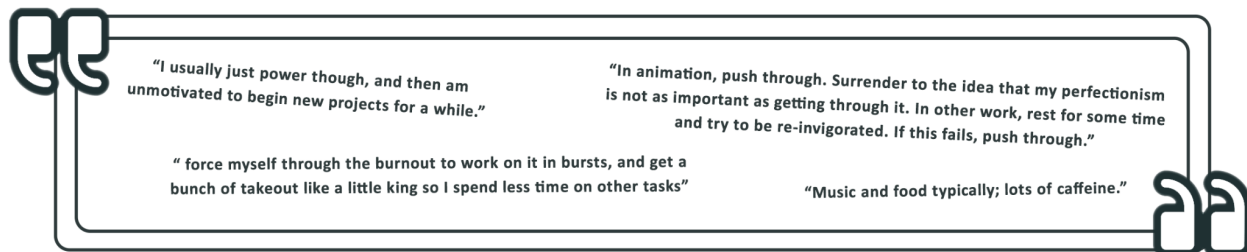
Working at something related to a project keeps our heads in the same world as our initial work— keeping ourselves *saturated with our creative juices*. Independent animation is a process that requires us to wear many hats, and it's a great boon for some to take advantage of the multifaceted nature of this process. When Andy and I spoke, he spoke of his recent reframing of how he thinks about creativity altogether...

"Instead of writing or drawing something for me to get stuck on, I'll spend an afternoon doing a watercolor cover, or in InDesign trying to figure out how this will be formatted. I bought a tracer, like an overhead projector, and spent a couple of days building this box to house it. They're all part of the same thing."

-Andy



In the survey results and interviews, there was a small percentage of those who **simply push ahead in the same process** until it's complete. *Soldiers, you are!*



"I don't have the typical habits that many people use to help change their flow or mood. Like drinking coffee, smoking, drinking alcohol, or going on a walk. I don't do any of them. So ...I don't know what I usually do. Maybe just sleep. But in general, I try not to overthink too much. If I think too far ahead it will only make me feel hopeless. It's important to just focus on what's in front of me now."

-Wada-san



"Wow."

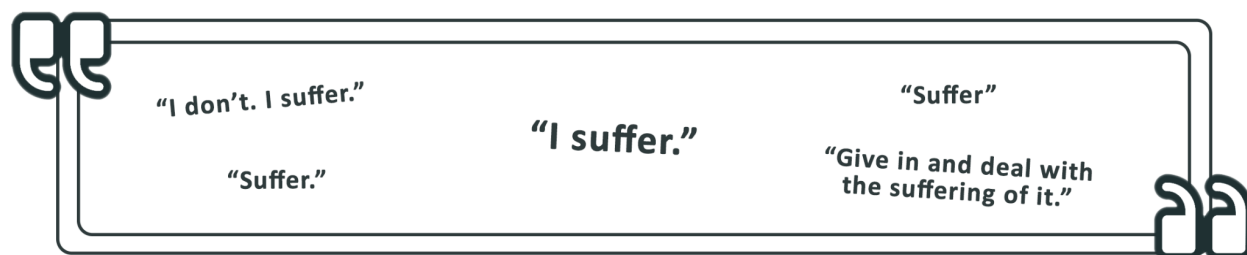
-Elisa (Interpreter)

"wow."

-John



The final, and thankfully the smallest category found among the responses, describes their persistence not as *powering through*, but in a slightly less optimistic vernacular;



For those of you who answer this survey in this way, *this thesis is for you*. So, enough suffering!

b. A Strong Foundation

"I think the first thing is to try to prevent yourself from working on a project that you'll *hate!*"

- Anu-Laura



It sounds a bit silly that one can wind up in such a situation, that we can actively, knowingly choose to start a project that we're not going to enjoy working on, but this is due to the often-divorced nature of an *ideal final product*, in relation to the work it takes to get such a thing completed. As I learned in my first flat in Tallinn, my first time living with a wood-burning stove as my only source of heat, sometimes the reason a fire doesn't last long is due to poor kindling and wood management. It can look promising one moment, and you'll find yourself back to *square one* the next.



"The initial motivation for me is usually quite intuitive, it's not too rational, not too analytical.

It's just, *I want to express a particular emotion, what's the emotion called?* I don't even know what the name of the emotion is.

I always have to let it sink, digest it, and see if it stays as strong as ever— after one day, after a week, after ten days. And if it does, then, then I know I'm on a good project. So, to be motivated in an animated film, usually there's a substratum of motivation which is steady— *I will, I'll make this film.* It's as simple as that."

-Michaël

Substratum, I think, is a useful word for thinking about our inspirations— In mycology, a *substrate* describes anything that the fungi can feed on in order to continue growing, as inspirations should function. Michaël has finely honed his sensibilities over many years, and of course, everyone begins their process in different ways. Wada-san, when visiting EKA a couple of years ago, revealed the unique nature of his projects' beginnings, which I asked him to recapitulate in our chat.

"There are very small differences in how I start a project, of course. However, to me a movement that *feels good* and *sounds good* comes to me at once. I would think, *for this movement, this pleasant sound matches well.* I think that both movement and sound come to me together for most of my pieces. "

-Wada-san



We build this strong foundation not to ensure our project's success, but more to develop the structures and folds of something we don't have to *suffer through* making.



"I just put a lot of work into the actual construction of the film, so that even if the end result isn't perfect, it'll still be emotional and interesting"

-Jonni

c. Organize, Discipline!

"Not only in animation, in whatever you want to achieve in life, you have to have discipline. There are so many goals you could have that need a lot of dedication, devotion, you have to have a routine to achieve it. And I think routine is really, in the basics of life, to have a routine that you can count on. If you know, I'm going to follow my routine every day, then you can trust yourself."

-Anu-Laura



Something I still struggle with greatly is getting myself into a disciplined practice. I find life too chaotic to boil down to a daily routine, with everything planned out to the hour. But as we will see with these other practices, it doesn't need to be a whole-cloth transformation; we can take small bits of these thoughts and incorporate them into our practice in healthy, step-by-step ways. Bruno, a scholar of the sounds of our planet, has amassed a library of field recordings, personal recordings, generative tools and visual elements that he can come back to for inspiration— keeping this toolbox, or rather, *LEGO box*, at his disposal has been invaluable to him, to return to and dig around in...



"I look around in the *LEGO box*, and find pieces that I never thought about, that suddenly fit in. Often I get to a point where I stop, and I don't know where to continue. Then there is some *deus ex machina*, a clip of video, an old animation experiment, a sound sample I've just recorded that says, *I'm going to take the lead!*"

-Bruno

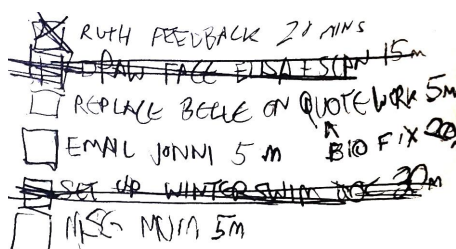
Bruno's use of this *LEGO box* feeds into another practice that we will speak on soon, but the principle of collating these inspirations in a navigable way is key to its utility. Perhaps more so than space, time requires organization to keep our work flowing in a healthy stream— from planning a day to planning a whole string of weeks or months. Another way to employ organization is to divide your workload into small pieces, and organize them in varied, digestible segments.

"A lot of students do come in with a story in mind, but often the volume and scope itself is so grand that it's hard to get into. So, I really try to emphasize breaking it down to maybe a single movement, a single action, or something generally much smaller."

-Wada-san



In my experience, few things feel better than crossing something off of a list, regardless of its difficulty. I also will note to myself little (often generous) estimations of the time it will take to finish each task, and this can greatly boost morale upon completing your task within or under your estimated time.





"Just chip away at it one thing at a time. Define the tasks. Write them down. Estimate and set deadlines. Organize the tasks. Start with the most complex portion, and work your way down. Even if it's slowly chipping away at smaller tasks that make up that big task, it will ultimately make the rest of the work less daunting once that most difficult portion is complete."

-Dan

Dan is someone who prefers short projects, despite his Draw A Dog Tuesday series lasting over a decade. The short-turnaround, weekly nature of the project keeps things fresh to him, despite his subject being the same. Similar to the workflow of a short film, with a similar subject or similar visual language, but with simple, clear, weekly results; without the bogging down of context, narrative dramaturgy, or any of that business.

"Once it became habitual, it became hard to stop - like most exercise once you get in a routine. I'd say on average they take a little over an hour to make, give or take. Don't get me wrong, there are times I don't want to draw a dog, but there's nothing wrong with a 3-frame boil now and then, right?"

-Dan



With every artist, comes a different approach to these mechanisms. Jonni's answers were fascinatingly sharp— no time for nonsense!



"I'm extremely organized and work all the time, and also balance my life pretty intensely- I schedule my entire weeks by hour, and then actually follow thru. The main thing is that I don't give up on the schedule and always try to stay on it no matter what. The more I've done that the easier it's gotten and I know exactly how much work I can get done at any interval of time. I animated all of *Barber Westchester* in 7 months- Not because I was pulling crazy hours, I would basically just work 9-5 every day, but was extremely intentional with my time. So I would maintain a healthy lifestyle where I had a work-life balance, but during the work hours I would take the project extremely seriously and get as much done as I could."

-Jonni

In our interview, Jonni denounced muses and inspirational sparks, in favor of a highly-organized, but healthy, realistic agreement with oneself. Intentionality and presence are key, regardless of one's ability to maintain focus or inspiration, and this is something we can work at with an organizational framework.

"You can't rely on inspiration or sparks for this stuff- That stuff is so willy nilly and disappears all the time. If I worked only whenever I was inspired, I wouldn't get anything done. You have to sit down and actually do the work and force yourself to come up with ideas, etc. It's like impossible to live a productive life when you're relying on a muse or something LOL"

-Jonni



d. Change & Collaboration

Let's revisit the *LEGO* box we last left that Bruno fellow in.



"At least for me, it's not something I can plan ahead for. I just need to *play with the elements*. I think of it as a box of *LEGO*, you pour it on the floor, you choose some, you build with them. You take something away, you add something else. This is always the first step for me."

-Bruno

Bruno views his work as an organism that has its own needs, that does what it wants. He is its guide, and its student. This approach can diffuse our sense of control over a project, often to our benefit, if we feel too precious about what goes into our work. This is the nature of experimental animation, but having an open mind to what life may give you and your film can work its way into a narrative workflow as well. Anu-Laura has a unique process with her current project; three films shot with stop-motion, outdoors, utilizing puppets made from porcelain, on 16mm film.

"It happens sometimes that nature gives you something surprising that you didn't even think of, the timing is somehow perfect, and your shot will be 10 times better than you could hope for, because the lighting is just perfectly timed, the sun came out *just* at the right moment, or some creature came in your shot you didn't even order. But it just knew it had to be there, and made a very nice shot. So to me, it's worth working to find this collaboration with the nature."

-Anu-Laura



As we learned in our exploration regarding *What Life Can Throw At Us*, and likely from our personal lived experiences, we are often the target of too many things to simply take the brunt of the barrage, and must instead learn to dodge and weave, learning its patterns. As Anu-Laura described, with so many elements outside of one's control at play, you must learn to *cooperate with the chaos*, as she phrases it.



"Allow for influences for inspirations on the way, purely out of nowhere; or influences from your collaborators."

-Michaël

Collaboration with another artist is an invaluable way to pick up your creative spirits. Similar to the functions of critique, collaboration opens us up to the thinking of others, while giving our process an extra element of change that keeps things lively outside of our own efforts. Exposure to the sunlight of others' minds helps our own ideas to bloom.

"You get to see how they work— It's like watching someone play a game you're familiar with, chess, for example; you learn how his mind works, how he takes decisions, how he reacts when confronting a new situation."

-Bruno



One of the primary projects within EKA's bachelor's course groups students together, sometimes just a pair, sometimes more, to make a stop-motion film. This exercise not only results in strong films, but can be a hugely valuable communicative experience.



"What I've seen in these groups is that one group member starts off very enthusiastic, like a leader, who sometimes *drops a bit*, but then another one, who seemed to be not so excited about it at all in the beginning, then takes the lead and actually helps the film to be finished!"

-Anu-Laura

Often, collaboration is thought of as something that is agreed upon from a project's beginning; but there is room for collaboration at any stage in the filmmaking process. Anu-Laura described the process of making her thesis work *Fly Mill* (2012) as a massive effort of collaboration; from her then-boyfriend assisting with set-building, her sister building and sewing many of her puppets, and her family and friends collecting handfuls of dead flies for her, to use as set-dressing in the film.

"One day I felt like, *ah, it would be nice to have some people helping me!*, but I didn't have any money to pay. So I just posted, asking for help, just, *Does anybody want to be my internship assistant? I will teach you!*"

-Belle



Large productions hinge on the combined efforts of many, and most animated shorts will lead the filmmaker, at the very least, to collaborate with a musician, or sound designer, to arrange their final sound mix. This, I experienced, can be a breath of fresh air in a process that feels stale, and instantly brings a new perspective to one's work.



"When I work with a musician, like Dylan for example, I usually work with them because I know their work and like it, so I have a lot of trust for the situation and allow them to do whatever feels right to them, with minimal notes, and give them a lot of information up front. I usually use exactly what they give me unless it's like, wrong tonally or something."

-Jonni

Many filmmakers will develop long-lasting relationships with musicians and sound-designers; their friendship and experience together developing their ability to communicate with one another on the subtleties of what they're looking for.

"When I have other animators in a project, they bring in different techniques and talent that I don't have, or a different kind of movement that's better than what I had initially imagined. So in that way, it's very interesting to collaborate, to get new kinds of movement from other artists."

-Wada-san



Wada-san, who identifies his work as often beginning with a single movement or sound, expressed that communicating the often-ineffable feeling one wants to convey to a new collaborator can be daunting, but this practice can only strengthen one's creative vocabulary. As Michaël also shared, this can sometimes take great effort, but ultimately be a healthy practice for the development of both the project on hand, and your own skills of creative communication for the future.



"I don't think there's an easy solution to that apart from just fine-tuning a friendship, or fine-tuning chemistry between you and your collaborators, your intuition, your empathy with other people."

-Michaël

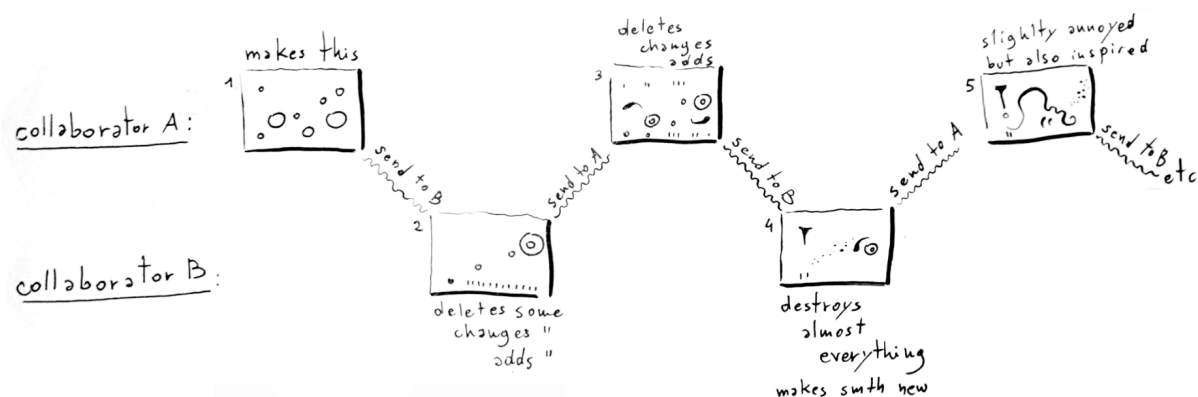
Another good practice is asking someone else to make their own cut of your project. Editing is the culmination of all of the effort and work put forward thus far, but our eyes aren't seeing *the story we aim to tell from the start*; they're seeing the *frames we shot* or the *images we drew*. A *fresh* pair of eyes can be crucial to separating the wheat from the chaff. It's common, as Anu-Laura says, to want to *control everything* as an animator.

"When I had to set the goal myself, I was imposing myself too much. I wanted things to be how I wanted them to be, and it wasn't so nice."

-Bruno



As Bruno experienced, letting go of this need for control *will set you free*. He described the *ping-pong method* (pictured below, in credit to Bruno), wherein you and your collaborator pass the project and all of its components back and forth, with the freedom to completely change, break down, or build up the materials you've been given.



Though not doable for every project, this exchange develops a unique dialect, a language between you and your collaborator; the visual, the audible, the dramatic.



"Some of my best collaborators, who added the most quality to my work, we actually spoke very little."

-Michaël

e. Embrace Longevity

The first step in embracing the duration of your work is being realistic with yourself about how long a project will likely take. Once accepted, this can put the work into a better perspective, and give us room to strategize around the processes ahead. This realization, for those who prefer projects with quicker turn-arounds, can feel a bit trapping, as had come up with Anu-Laura— but for some, the duration of an animated work can ease the mind; *you don't have to worry about what's next for a while!*

"For me, it is really soothing to know what I am going to do for the next months, or years, it's one reason why I like to work on animation. I don't want to do a project quickly, and then move quickly to another project. Many artists say, in relation to animation, *I would never be interested in the same idea for many months or years in a row!* I don't want to get bored. But when you're working on an animation project, you cannot get bored because you're safe! For many months, you know what you're going to do, it's all *planned for you!* It's good to see what I'm going to do... it's so much confidence and security. A *safe job!*"

-Anu-Laura



Of course, not everyone can embrace this way of thinking so immediately, myself included! It's worth noting that Anu-Laura builds her puppets and her films to suit more than just a screening— she has already shown elements of her current project in galleries around the world, and has considered the possibilities of her works' other potential venues outside of a festival context.

Incremental work doesn't always bring incremental satisfaction, but if we encounter a feeling of *having nothing to show* after months of hard work, it's good to remind ourselves that this artwork we make along the way is a valuable step toward this greater thing, but also something one can appreciate for its own merits. Luckily, we live in a time where publishing a complete, minutes-long film is not the only outlet for our animation practice— the internet is a place where short, even tiny-format work has a welcome place among its visual economy. As we learned, Dan makes animated work that he finds enjoyable and satisfying, without the pressure of longevity from cycle to cycle—



"For me, the ratio is maybe like 10:90 in a joy:drudgery ratio related to long-term projects. That's why I tend to avoid them. I don't really consider the Draw-A-Dog-Tuesday series a long-term project even though it has spanned a long-term just because the production cycle is so short being that it's one day a week. In that series in particular the ratio of joy to drudgery is probably inverted from what I said prior. I definitely enjoy either the process or the result of a lot of those dogs. Sometimes it's a slog to come up with an idea or get my hand to do what I want it to, but overall it's still an exercise I find rewarding."

-Dan

f. Balance

"Animation is such a time consuming art form that I want to make sure I'm not focusing all my time on it. It's tough when your day job is commercial animation. There's definitely a risk of burnout, so it's important to balance things."

-Dan



As touched upon in our observations on organization, sorting out your time is invaluable to maintaining a healthy work ethic. As we heard earlier when discussing expectations, the stresses surrounding an unrealistic drive to be creative *all the time* is what put Andy out of work and into a state of disarray. After going through a couple of months of this, he eventually found a solace in *balance*, in *stopping to smell the roses*, and in the enjoyment of purposefully taking breaks from making art and being creative.



"As my health improved, I became more and more grateful for just, like, *being alive*, and the small things in life. Being able to hang out with my kid and my wife, or, y'know, going on a small trip, going to the ocean to hang out, or have a nice meal, or exercise, just do things that I normally would never have the time for. I mean, there was a point actually I was thinking, *maybe I shouldn't do artwork anymore*. But over the last month or two, I've come to a nice balance, and I realized I actually enjoy being creative. When everything else is working, when everything else is in a good place, it's a natural component for me."

-Andy

This balance can also be offset by big changes in one's life, career, living space, or schooling situation. As we'll soon discuss, if you have an understanding and a clarity with *yourself*, this awareness can offer stability in times where other elements may be out of one's control to balance. After developing and applying a strong sense of self-knowledge, Anu-Laura has managed to work a balance into her practice; building her projects to compliment her needs outside of art-making.

"If I'm shooting now, outside in the winter, and the day starts nicely, but then it turns into a storm, and I have to quit shooting, I may have wasted my shooting, but at least I haven't wasted *a day of my life!*"

-Anu-Laura



"I did all of the little things that I want to do in my life, for the whole year!"

"Did you like, *celebrate everyone's birthdays in one week, just to get them out of the way?*"

-John

"Nooo, I just feel I have the educational work I've already taken part in, and now all of the festival stuff is resolved, and I have a secure amount of money, and I'm connecting with my family. It's already settled now, and I know the balance of it. So, like, now, *it's time for me to work!*"

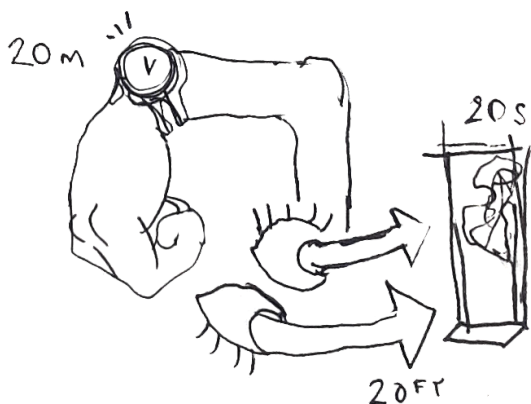
-Belle



As the survey results showed us, some ~55% of the survey-takers push back against creative block by disconnecting completely from the project at hand, while some 35% often find something else within their project that they can do when one task grows to be too tedious. Learning how you define and maintain your creative balance can be key to your peace of mind. A wonderful thing about animation is that the process often involves many different creative elements.

We must recognize that this idea of balance can not just be applicable to the macro, but to the micro as well— a work day needs even scales as well. Burning out can happen in the center of what could be a productive period in the working day. Pairing well with Anu-Laura's recognition of her needs outside of the filmmaking process, for some it can be a massive boon to consider if our working day, not just our working week, can be balanced to give us space to think clearly.

Something I came across in my own research is a method for balancing one's work is called the **Pomodoro Technique**^[10]; a method developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980's. So named for Cirillo's tomato-shaped kitchen timer, it segments the user's time into measured work and break periods, training its user in an almost Pavlovian way. As we must keep in mind with all of these principles, the specifics, the proper periods of time of working and breaking from it can vary from person to person, so doing your own experimentation is key.



Another healthy method I've incorporated into my working-day's balance, especially in the midst of editing or compositing, is known as the **20-20-20 Rule**^[11], wherein every 20 minutes, look away from your monitor for 20 seconds, to a distance at least 20 feet (roughly 6 meters) away. This can serve as a time to give your eyes a chance to rest, your hands, back and shoulders a chance to stretch, and your mind a chance to reflect on your progress so far.

"Change perspective when you're stuck; maybe just step back, and put a little distance between you and what your problem is. Don't hyper-focus on that problem, it's usually not as bad as you imagine it to be. Back up a bit. Back up a bit."

-Wada-san



g. Know Thyself!

Advice to someone that you haven't met is a foreign currency— useful to someone, somewhere, but not necessarily you, where you're at, at this moment. Most important of all is to know *yourself*, your process, your approach, your pitfalls, so you can know what to look out for. I hope that these explorations into the places where we often falter have given you a torch by which you can find your way forward. Lastly, I ask you in turn, to make yourself a map, as only you know the trail you've traveled thus far...



"It's very healthy to question your main motivations, because some people want the *glamor of winning awards*, but they don't really want to make films. And you have to be very clear on that. It may be perfect that you make a beautiful student film, and maybe one film after that.

And maybe that's enough; and then you become a producer or go into a new career, or do something else entirely. There's no pressure to keep making films, on anyone.

-Michaël

Looking inward can be frightening! It's not often that we are pushed in our artistic processes to self-analyze. For those who identified strongly with the *Doubt* section of Part 2, you may find what your inner-voice tells you is a bit rude and sort of off-putting, so instead, get some input from your fellow animators. You'll likely learn that you have more to offer than you give yourself credit for. Especially for students, it's important to be as kind to oneself as we are rigid— we have to give ourselves room to grow.

"What I have seen mostly happen with the students is that, since they are all making their first stop-motion films, *they don't know their own skills*. They are discovering what their strengths and their weaknesses are, and I've seen people be disappointed when they intend to make some realistic puppets or realistic sets, but they just don't have the skills, and then they make something that doesn't look as perfect as they intended. It can be because they don't have the skills, or they don't have the *patience*; maybe they are a little bit less focused and devoted to do what they intended to do."

-Anu-Laura



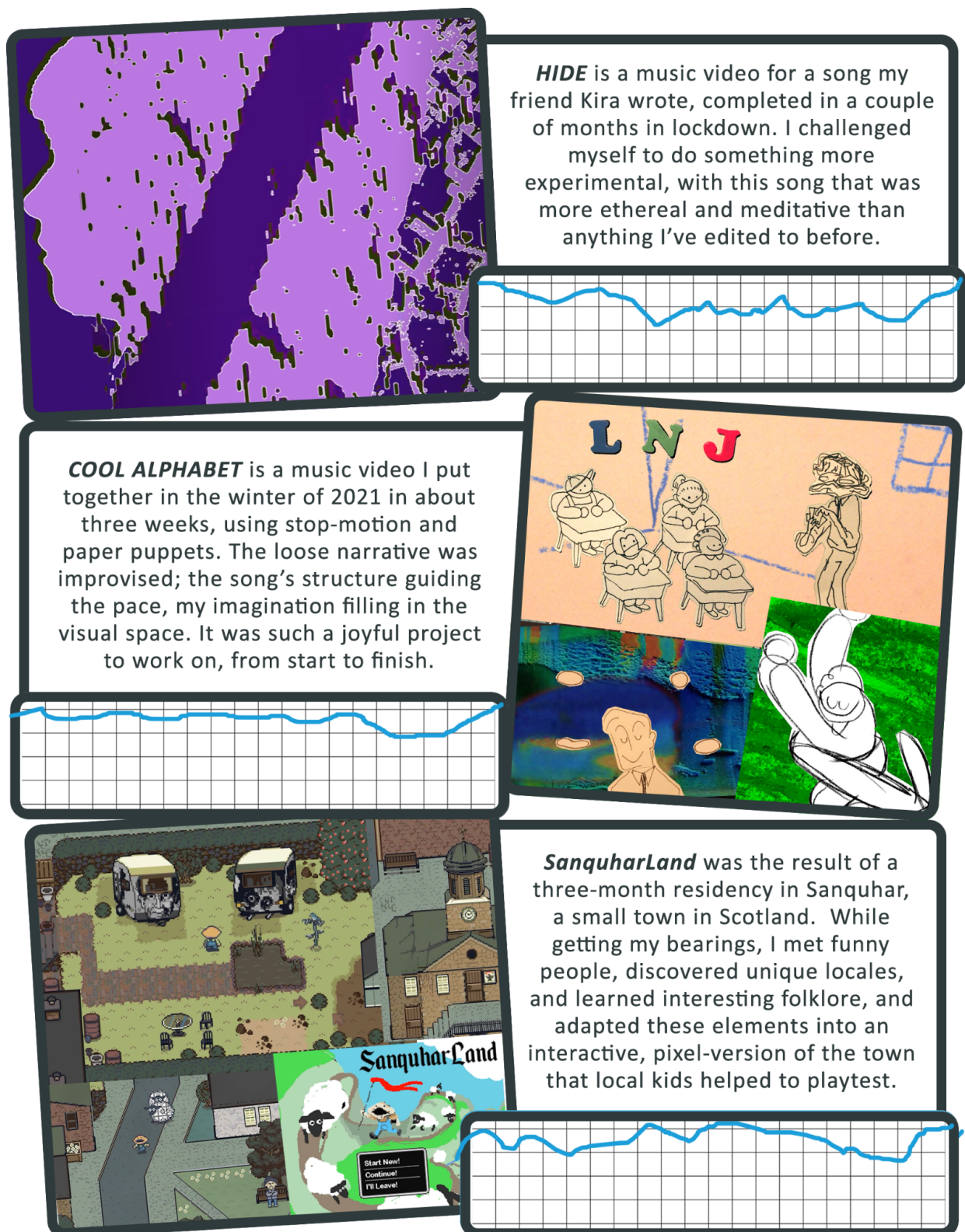
Assembling a short film, especially one that speaks to something for which you care deeply, can be a difficult task. What's needed for this task aren't innate strengths that we all come equipped with, but these strengths are things that bloom with time, things we can nurture and grow through experience. And while we can't always smother our weaknesses *completely*, we can grow to accept them, to *work with them*.



"It takes a certain type of personality to do this, you shouldn't *force it*. It's not supposed to be a pain, you have to enjoy the *grinding*, doing the same thing every day, and stick with the same idea, to feel safe in having the same project for two years. Not the pressure of being *trapped with your silly idea*."

-Anu-Laura

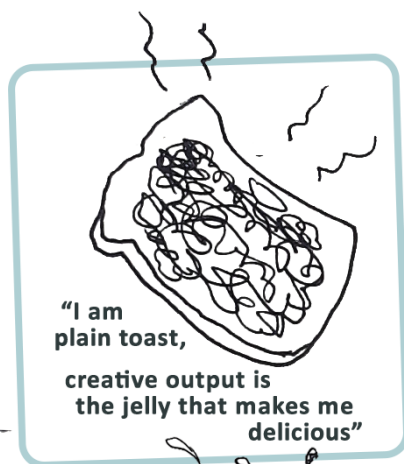
Since slogging through the process of making *Dogdog*, I decided to document the ups and downs of my projects moving forward, as seen graphed out below.



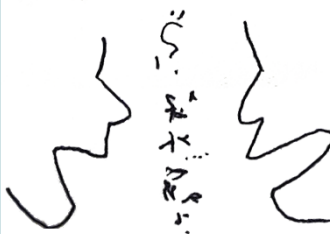
These projects were made concurrent with the interviews and research for the thesis, so while the shorter turnaround and the lesser degree of pressure were certainly a factor, I found that the advice and thinking I encountered in my research really positively affected the processes, and in turn the results, of these projects.

h. Metaphors In Making

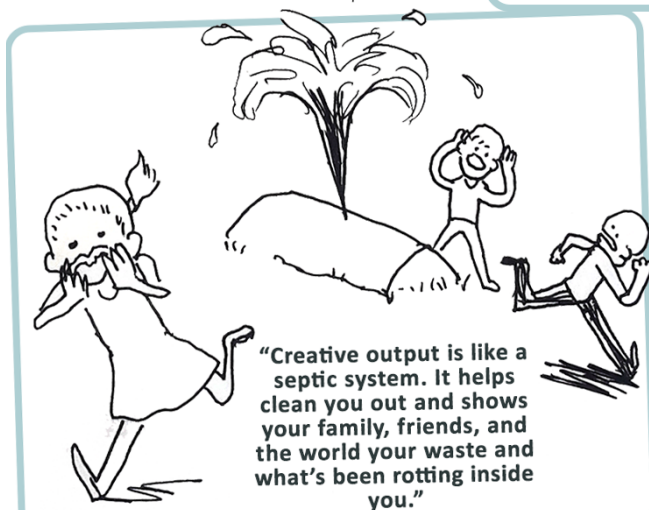
I asked my interviewees, as well as the survey-takers, if they would come up with a metaphor to describe their relationship with their creativity. Here are a potent few.



"Creative output is my native language, it's the only thing I know that makes sense and I know I'll always use it my whole life."



"A few years ago, my creative output had a shape. Then, the shape got slowly liquefied. Currently it is more like a cookie dough that I can eat raw or bake it."



I think it's like planting a small tree. Like, when you start planting it, you have an excitement to see it growing.

But when it starts growing, like, one month of growth, it will have some problem coming; sometimes it's the weather, or sometimes it will be the soil itself, and the nutrients, or needs to be cut back.



You have to keep solving problems to keep this tree's strength. Sometimes it will die out, but anyway, you already have the experience of growing the tree. So it will give you more knowledge to grow a tree better, for next time."

"Making my own art is like visiting an old friend."



When I haven't made my own art in a while, I worry it'll be weird or difficult trying to make something for myself again, but once I start it feels easy and natural, like nothing has changed."

"It's like blinking, just gotta do it or else my body gets itchy, I guess"



Creative output is like a big cool hat I wear when I am alone.

I invite you to make your own, so as to have a lens with which to observe your process, where enthusiasm falls and rises, and how to sustain it in a way that works for you !

i. Credits and Thanks

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Interview Subjects:

[Anu-Laura Tuttelberg](#)

[Bruno Quast](#)

[Andy London](#)

[Atsushi Wada](#)

[Dan Kelly](#)

[Michaël Dudok de Wit](#)

[Keawalee \(Belle\) Warutkomain](#)

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I hope you will, too!

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