

Animating from the Margins:
Women's Memoir and Auteur Animation as a
Method for Radical Storytelling

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis explores the potential of animation as a medium for investigating conventions and constructions of storytelling. Through an intersectional analysis of the work of female auteur animators and the genre of memoir, animated film and its production serve as a method for radical and subversive storytelling. The project combines traditional academic research and the investigation of production and critique to begin a discourse surrounding animated narratives which illuminate women's experiences and personal narratives. It also investigates my short film *Mark* through a critique which inspects my personal influences, goals, and techniques as a product and synthesis of stylistic conventions of animation and graphic narrative. Concepts of self and creation are treated both personally and critically to address the effects of the discrimination of the personal narratives and creative practices of women within the industry, and a reflection of my own practice serves to examine the process of animating as inherently interdisciplinary.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preface

The work of an artist is to introduce change; their motivation often lies in innovation within their creative practice and field, transformation and translation within visual communication and interdisciplinary spaces, and perhaps most importantly, revolution within cultural spheres and social margins. This thesis, the product of both traditional academic research, creative production, and critique, will investigate the motivations and methods by which women animators instigate change and social critique; it analyzes the intersection between women's auteur animation, independent animation and animated memoir from a feminist perspective, establishing the processual relationship between them as a radical act which resists conventions of male narrative construction within both the medium and the genre. It serves to not only elevate the work of women animators and the discourse surrounding the medium, but also builds a framework of analysis which helps me understand my own work and creative process, as well as the history of women's animation.

My artistic practice revolves around fabricating lies—constructing non-existent characters, imagined realities and illusions of life—to communicate narrative. In return, I ask my audience to suspend their disbelief and vision of reality to partake in my personal interpretation of the truth; to abandon their own notions of personhood, order, and comfort. To animate, by definition, is to bring thing to life,¹ and I have found very few media as convincing, accessible, and exciting as animation in the pursuit of

¹ “Animation.” *Merriam Webster*, Merriam Webster.

storytelling. Animation blurs boundaries of fact and fiction, defies the laws of physics, and consistently breaks conventions of filmmaking. It is animated by nature—it resists fixed formulations of technology and intent. It is a medium that requires you to establish rules, and then, 24 times a second, it encourages you to break them. Narrative animation only complicates the medium further, and it can be more easily understood functioning as a metaphor. Animation, as a medium, exists as a type of fiction.

Everything is constructed, and regardless of how close it may imitate life, by definition, it is everything but. Animation operates as the vehicle. Comparatively, the act of writing personal narrative is the act of uncovering some form of truth whether or not it is accurate—and thus, the narrative being communicated is the tenor. Animated memoir acts as a crafted metaphor, whereas the visual image informs the narrative—a lie which communicates the ecstatic truth²—offering established visual systems from which the audience can develop a deeper understanding of the story being pursued by the animator.

The practicality, complexity, and pure formal qualities of animation seem to assert the potential of the investigation of personal memoir within the medium, and for visual studies generally. These qualities have drawn me to animation not only an artist who explores memoir and identity, but even inadvertently; as a child, desperate for representation and diversity on the screen, I was attracted to animated film like the flickering of a flame, hungry to see my own personal experiences—or at least something similar—affirmed and celebrated. This thesis was originally developed as a

² Ebert, Roger. “Herzog's Minnesota Declaration: Defining 'Ecstatic Truth' | Roger Ebert's Journal | Roger Ebert.” Roger Ebert, 30 Apr. 1999.

methodical investigation of my own interests, influences, and body of work, with the intention of acknowledging my weaknesses as an animator and storyteller to create what is often vaguely referred to as “better work”—to become a more efficient writer, animator, and communicator, and to frame and share my own stories in a way that impacted and inspired others, just as other films had impacted and inspired me.

The goal I had made for myself illuminated one of the fundamental issues that animation faces as a medium; throughout the past century, the use and perception of the medium in the public eye has remained unmoving. Innovation in art and the creation of “better work” requires that the artist overturns conventions of their chosen medium; it makes sense that the histories of form and function, storytelling and style, and vehicle and tenor are inextricably linked. As Paul Wells notes in his book, *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, animation, though omnipresent in the modern era, suffers from both a history of systematic neglect within academic circles, as well as within creative circles.³ The conventional understanding of the medium is informed primarily by its relationship to American cartoons—as Maureen Furniss clarifies; in every artistic medium,

there are dominant forms of expression that tend to define it within the minds of people in the general public, if not specialists in the field. Within the realm of animation, one can identify at least four such traits: animation is (1) American and (2) created with cel artwork (3) made by famous men (4) at the Disney studio.⁴

It’s this mythical understanding of the operation of the Disney studio that establishes Disney as the “creative fountainhead from which all other animation

³ Wells, Paul. *Animation: Genre and Authorship*. Wallflower, 2007.

⁴ Furniss, Maureen. *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*. Sydney: Libbey, 1998. Print.

springs,”⁵ but also directly contributes to the lack of academic interest in the medium. After all, how could it be possible that a medium so well understood and rigidly defined by its repetition of form and genre be worth of study or debate? The industrialization of American animation and the “Disney Myth” has injected both stylistic and narrative standards into the medium that are held to be the ideal, crafted with male-defined conventions of perspective, structure, and storytelling at the forefront, while also contributing to the “tradition of obscurity” which plagues those working within the industry—the constant lack of accreditation of early animated films only continued to bury the women that helped produce them, preventing women animators from establishing their names within the industry circles.⁶ Resisting this narrative of tradition in animation—what Judith Mayne describes to be purely fundamental feminist inquiry in her essay, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism*, requires “reading against the grain”⁷ and the acknowledgement that these standards have become historically naturalized within the medium for both the creator and the consumer.

To be clear, no artist can exist in a vacuum, and subverting tradition isn't a requirement or a condition for creating beautiful and effecting narrative animation. Innovative narrative animation doesn't demand that we reject established institutions of

⁵ Taylor, K. Vivian. Nationality, Gender, and Genre: The Multiple Marginalization of Lotte Reiniger and *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926). Department of English College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida, 31 Mar. 2011.

⁶ Edera, Bruno. *Full Length Animated Feature Films*. Ed. and Foreword by John Halas. New York: Hastings, 1977. Print.

⁷ Mayne, Judith. "The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema." *Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*. Eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams. Frederick, MD: U Pub. of Amer., 1984. Print.

animation, but that we refuse passive consumption of animation in order to advance the critical discourse surrounding the medium. In fact, it can be argued that the alteration in the perception of the complex relationships between the past, present, and future of animation is necessary to enrich the scholarly and academic approach to the animation studies.⁸ In interrogating animated narrative, we gain much more than a basic understanding of semiotics and visual theory, and in the same way, investigating memoir reveals more than an understanding of self. Jennifer Anne McCue explains in *Empowering the Female Voice: Interdisciplinarity, Feminism, and the Memoir*, that personal narratives “reveal life experiences that are undeniably and intrinsically connected to cultural contexts,” exemplifying societal norms. The similarities between the medium and the genre—the fact that though both are deeply entrenched in male conventions and contexts of storytelling and therefore equally present opportunities to critique the cultural conventions they arise from—present them as an ideal pairing through which women animators can share and explore their personal narratives and perspectives through constructed visual languages. Understanding these conventions not only allows me to develop and investigate my own practice and narrative self, but informs my work and reinforces the value of women in animation. These motivations have become the focus of my thesis.

This thesis, both as a paper and a creative project, intends to incorporate both traditional academic research, as well an investigation of creative production and critique, into a discourse regarding women’s auteur and animated memoir. It analyzes the product of women’s auteur animation and women’s animated memoir together from

⁸ Taylor, 13.

a feminist perspective, establishing them as a combined practice which radically resists and actively appropriates the conventions of both the medium and the genre. It serves to expose those conventions, established by the overabundance and influence of male narratives in both the medium and the genre, in order to elevate the work of women animators and discourse surrounding the medium. My goal is to begin to establish a critical framework for which narrative animation can be analyzed through the combination of both visual and sociocultural theory, to understand the role and relationship of identity and image-making within my practice and animated memoir, and ultimately, to make “better work”.

List of Terms

Before we delve into the rich history of animation and women within the animation industry, I believe it’s important to refine the terms being used within this paper related to visual theory, narrative theory, and sociocultural theory, in order to 1) demystify what may be seen as inaccessible to those unversed in visual theory and to make the conversation more specific within animation studies, to 2) define narrative conventions and structure to establish a basis for critique and analysis, and 3) to clarify sociocultural terms surrounding gender and the gender binary to acknowledge the limitations of my research and writing, and so as to not conflate the experiences of trans and cis women.

Animation

Animation, for such a widely consumed medium, is not easy to pin down formally. Animator Norman McLaren provides a conceptual solution, defining

animation as “the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between [...] frames”,⁹ while animator Preston Blair argues that animation should be defined by its craft-oriented techniques, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary processes of visual study and drawing in creating “lifelike” movements on the screen.¹⁰ Animation isn’t solely a process of manipulation and mimicry, but more so, it is a process by which the animator utilizes technology and an understand of visual theory and graphic narrative to convey ideas and emotions, to represent physical presence and space, and to most importantly, tell stories. For this thesis, I’d like to refine its definition and categorization as a solution to a contemporary problem, as new technologies and practices which contribute to animation and film continue to develop every day, obscuring the formal boundaries which tentatively define the medium. Because the conversation within my thesis is concerned with authorship and the auteur animator, the form will be considered, as suggested by Furniss; as being “situated within a continuum between mimesis and abstraction,”¹¹ whereas the individual film operates within the continuum in relationship to its representational forms. This allows animation to be defined as a medium through which sequence and form are completely constructed, but doesn’t confine it to specific physical attributes—animation can be completely computer generated, produced with media like clay, comprised of series of images, or anywhere in between. Furniss’ definition demands that the animator make intentional choices regarding visual representation and narrative construction. It requires them to

⁹ Weinberg, Gretchen. "MC et Moi." *Film Culture* 25 (1962): 47. Print.

¹⁰ Wells, 4.

¹¹ Furniss, 5.

establish rules and conventions within the visual language, and to acknowledge when they are broken. Animation, for the purposes of this thesis, and perhaps at its most simple, is time-based constructed visual storytelling.

Auteur and Independent Animation

Attempting to understand and define auteur theory within animation is not a clear path. Authorship, especially within the history of industrialized animation is easily misinterpreted or obscured entirely. In Michael Century's essay, *Exact imagination and Distributed Creativity: a Lesson from the History of Animation*, he points to the auteur tradition as a movement which developed in direct oppositional response to the elitism within the industrial system, aligning it with the experimental independent tradition of animation.¹² Wells presents a definition which supports in the industrialized auteur, noting that "animation may be viewed as the most auteurist of film practices [...] and it's very process, even one at its most collaborative, insist upon the cohesive intervention of an authority or present."¹³ However, Mayne simplifies the auteurist product, pointing to the responsibility of the auteur to the work,¹⁴ and the control of a single auteurist force, and thus, a single perspective and creative voice within a film, as the defining characteristic of auteur animation. For the purpose of this thesis, the emphasis is placed not on the independence of production, but on the single authoritative vision and voice which oversees the film as the most important defining characteristic of auteur tradition. This allows us to observe both independent and

¹² Century, Michael. "a Lesson from the History of Animation." *Exact Imagination and Distributed Creativity*, ACM.

¹³ Wells, 73.

¹⁴ Mayne, 13.

experimental animation, but also commercial and industrialized animation, analyzing the way in which women find agency as auteurs within both spheres.

Memoir and Personal Narrative

A story, as defined by Robert Franzosi in his essay *Narrative Analysis--or Why (and How) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative*, “implies a change in situations as expressed by the unfolding of a specific sequence of events”.¹⁵ His definition emphasizes the sequential values of narratives, and their ability to be constructed and understood as dependent on clear structure and order within the storyline. However, memoir and personal narrative often situate themselves outside this definition. Feminist activist and writer Marilyn Bosquin argues that “the real story in every memoir, regardless of its topic, is the transformation of the self.”¹⁶ How does this exploration of the transformation of self inform the development of a structured, time-based narrative? Mariam Chammat, a neuroscientist with the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research, explains that “our memories are influenced by how we want things to have been, and not necessarily the way things were,”¹⁷ which leads to discrepancies in creating a coherent, linear story. The construction of memoir and narrative is better explained and understood as the reconstruction of memories and personal biases, not necessarily as the assemblage of truth and personal past. Memoir and personal narrative, and their presence within the realm of storytelling, defy

¹⁵ Franzosi, Roberto. “Narrative Analysis--or Why (and How) Sociologists Should Be Interested in Narrative.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Annual Reviews, 1998.

¹⁶ Bosquin, Marilyn. *Memoir with a View: Discovering the Metaphor of Your Narrator’s Experience*. Writing Women’s Lives. 2015.

¹⁷ Gholipour, Bahar. *Writing a Memoir Is a Strange Psychological Trip Through Your Past*. The Cut. 2015.

conventions of narrative construction, and their value as creative genres lies in their ability to manipulate truth and perspective within narratives of self and change and not necessarily in their prices approach to communicating change and transformation.

Gender binary, language, privilege, and limitation

Writing about women in the animation industry and the binary relationship between men and women throughout the histories of animation and personal writing is important for the purposes of this thesis, as it illuminates the discrimination and discreditation of women within the industry as a systemic issue. I want to define the terms I am using in my paper to clarify my use of terms related to the gender binary, which is caused by the exclusionary and harmful effects of gendered language and conventions of gender. American history, especially the history of industrialization in America, is deeply involved with gender binarism, and thus man and woman are distinct, rigid categories. These culturally-constructed categories, informed by American historical traditions, view women as essentially “feminine” and men as essentially “masculine”, and therefore represent and maintain power hierarchies between the binarized male and female genders. The terms femininity and masculinity are so strictly embedded in traditional and toxic binarism that they seem counterproductive in the pursuit of equality—they are antiquated tools used to define individuals by their assigned genders, and to oppress those who deviate from their behavioral and aesthetic conventions. Therefore, unless they are present within the quoted texts, they will not be used in the conversation as signifiers of womanhood or manhood.

In most of the scholarship I will be looking at, the term “women” refers to cisgender women, and excludes trans women. Because the material I will be analyzing surrounding women’s narratives and gender discrimination in the animation industry is extremely limited and does not holistically address the nuances of gender discrimination in the field for trans and nonbinary people, my paper will use the term “women” to refer to cis women, and the term “men” to refer to cis men. As so much of this essay relies on personal reflection and my understanding of my identity as a cis woman in the field of animation, I think it is important to define my use of the word women so as to not equate the experiences of trans women and cis women. By analyzing the ways in which the centering of cis male narratives within animation and memoir has and continues to contribute to the marginalization of other identities, I can understand my own identity and privilege as a cis woman, and the ways that cis male dominated spheres and gender binarism have influenced me and my sense of narrative self. I am narrowing my own work and personal reflections to only address the experiences of cis women in the field, as to prevent myself from speaking for those with identities I do not occupy. I believe that the omission and suppression of nonbinary and trans voices in the arts and within art scholarship to be the greatest limitations to the research and conversations surrounding gender discrimination in animation.

Chapter 2: Literature and Film Review

Women in Animation: Working within the margins

The entirety of this project sits within the discourse surrounding what feminist critic and literary theorist Guyatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the “masculine center” and the “feminist margin”—the traditional cultural tendency towards the split between men and women, resulting in the marginalization of women in order to uphold and guard the centralization of male perspectives, power, and control in literature and creative practices.¹⁸ The narrative conventions of film, arguably descendants of the narrative conventions of the novel,¹⁹ carries with it the same exclusionary practices against women in writing and academia, while the technical nature of animation brings with it the underlying sexism that permeates tech industries.²⁰ The constant suppression and discrediting of women’s voices in animation and film have historically and systemically contributed to general absence of women directing, producing, and writing for the screen, thus resulting in conventions and expectations of narrative voice and style which lie in male aesthetics.

This doesn’t mean that animation is necessarily defined formally by these aesthetics and conventions, but rather it is misinterpreted and misunderstood as a medium—its potential for experimentation and innovation is actively and purposefully obscured in order to maintain the male center. The beloved *Animator’s Survival Kit*

¹⁸ Spivak, Guyatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987. Print.

¹⁹ Mayne, 29.

²⁰ Tupper, Carrie. *A History of Women in Animation: Mothers of a Medium*. The Mary Sue. 2014.

written by Richard Williams is a standard manual for anyone interested in the animation industry. At its most careless, it uses stick figures and genders them as male by default. At its most offensive, it uses homophobic remarks and sexist stereotypes to teach growing animators how to draw women and gay men, passing off his homophobic and sexist portrayals as nothing more than “exaggerated form”.²¹ If the male center, as well as this sexist manual for the representation of women on the screen, can only exist through the standardization of style and visual syntax, then it could be said that it is the breaking and bending the rules of animation—not necessarily the outright refusal of them— which is inherently radical and feminist by nature. This feminist inquiry is again, as Mayne notes, nothing more than “reading against the grain of patriarchal institutions,”²² and requires a knowledge of how cinematic structures evolved and became naturalized, in order to progress, act, and innovate.

Lotte Reiniger: Accessible production and innovation

By the end of World War I, Berlin had become the hotbed for experimental animation, with artists like Oskar Fischinger and Hans Richter arising out of the growing interest in *rhythmus*, the animated integration of abstract shapes and colors with music to emphasize timing and tempo. The development of special effects and animation technology in Berlin in the twenties led Lotte Reiniger, an experimental German animation assistant, to create the first full length animated film, *the Adventures of Prince Achmed*, in 1926. Vivian Taylor’s essay, *Nationality, Gender, and Genre: The Multiple Marginalization of Lotte Reiniger and The Adventures of Prince Achmed*

²¹ Williams, Richard. *The Animator's Survival Kit*. Faber and Faber, 2012.

²² Mayne, 50.

(1926), delves into the many reasons why the products of Reiniger's work—the invention of the multiplane camera, her feminist critique of the animation industry, and the ways she was able to find exposure and success at all during this period—have been relatively unrecognized in animation history. It examines the ways in which she faced intersectional marginalization due to her occupation, gender, and nationality, and attempts to extend the focus of the critical discourse surrounding animation and sociocultural history outside the Golden Age (1940's—50's)²³, emphasizing the importance of the origins of narrative animation through an examination of the beginnings of the medium within the greater film industry.

Though her films weren't autobiographical, the ways which Reiniger approached filmmaking provides insights to the ways in which animation, at its most fundamental, defies the male center in storytelling. Her use of cut forms and silhouetted figures and stages served her films twofold; the representation of female characters as constructed and controlled emphasized the restrictions and lack of autonomy that women faced, while the accessibility of the tools for women inhabiting domestic spaces made production and animation an accessible art form for women. In *The Art of Lotte Reiniger*, a 1970 short documentary about the artist, Reiniger encourages women to transform their dining table into a light box—to literally “cut a hole”²⁴ through it to experiment with animation themselves. Reiniger's invitation to reclaim and destroy the dining table suggests the transformation of a symbol of domesticity into a tool for

²³ Meyer, Andrew. *Animation or Cartoons: An American Dilemma*. Seattle Pacific University. 2016.

²⁴ Isaacs, John. *The Art of Lotte Reiniger*. Primrose Productions. 1970.

creative autonomy, and thus acts as a radical call for women to break into the industry, emphasizing the opportunity for innovation and female agency in animation.

As both a pioneer for women's arts and animation and the inventor of medium-defining animation technology, it's a wonder that Lotte Reiniger has not become a household historical name, or at least, energetically studied as a founding name in animation. While some cite the refusal of American audiences to engage in foreign film,²⁵ the enthusiastic use of Reiniger's technical achievements in American animation seems to discount theories of nationalism or disinterest. In 1934, Disney created their first feature-length film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, introducing the multiplane camera into their toolkit—the same technology Reiniger had introduced almost a decade earlier. It is the concept of Spivak's male center that perseveres through the last century of animation history, clearly responsible for the silencing of women animators following Reiniger's lead. In 1938, the infamous rejection letter from Disney addressed to Mary V. Ford, applying for a trainee position at the studio, illustrated the American expectations for women in the industry;

...Women do not do any of the creative work in connection with preparing the cartoons for the screen, as that work is performed entirely by young men. [...] The only work open to women consists of tracing the characters on clear celluloid sheets with Indian ink and filling in the tracings on the reverse side with paint according to directions.²⁶

²⁵ Ren, Gillian. *Attention Must Be Paid: Lotte Reiniger. The Solute*. 2018.

²⁶ Walt Disney Productions, Ltd. "Miss Mary V. Ford..." 1938.

The Boys Club and the rise of the feminist auteur

The beginnings of the cartoon tradition, the “Disney Myth”, and the historical imaginary that has long been reinforced as the Golden Age of animation are all a product of the exclusive “boys club” of Walt Disney Animation Studios. Rejections like that of Ms. Ford weren’t the only barriers to entry for women in the commercial animation industry, as even the women working for the studio were rarely named in the credits,²⁷ which contributed to the continuing marginalization of female animators, preventing them from entering, growing, and contributing to the commercial industry. The formal and visual traditions of Disney, the same as those outlined in *The Animator’s Survival Kit*, objectified women and their bodies, while at the same time it pursued narratives centering around female characters living within the shadows of active male roles, inscribing them with “prototypical” features²⁸; The submissive, tender, compassionate, and hysterical woman became the standard for female representation on the screen.

Disney Animation had the power and exposure to perpetuate the medieval stereotypes from which their plotlines were consistently based; the industrialization of the medium led to the celebration of the “invisible hand” of animation, (i.e. the death of the author) and the entertainment and spectacle of animation could only be consistently achieved through the mechanization of the process. Yet parallel to the division of labor required for industrialized cel animation, there grew a strong tradition of independent, experimental animators in a movement of opposition and elitism of the industrial

²⁷ Taylor, 25.

²⁸ Buguera, Xavier Fuster. Muffled Voices in Animation. Gender Roles and Black Stereotypes in Warner Brothers Cartoons: From Honey to Babs Bunny. Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov. 2011.

system.²⁹ Feminist film theorist Claire Johnston proposes this movement as the solution to the representation of women and women's narratives; "[women's] objectification...can only be challenged by developing the means to interrogate the male, bourgeois cinema... Any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality."³⁰ The growing wave of independent female animators did just this; artists like Kathy Rose, Faith Hubley, and Mary Beams, shattered distinctions of public and private narrative, made the personal political, and created work that defied the conventions of a decidedly patriarchal media history in the sixties and onward through their use of surreal imagery and unwavering treatment of traumatic, bold, and intimate narratives. The experimental narratives and fluid realities that women presented allowed them to illustrate themselves through an exploration of their identities, goals, and perspectives. The beginnings of feminism in animation relied solely on the concept of authorship.

Women's Auteur and Graphic Memoir

Personal narratives are situated between social culture and human agency, shaped both by the intent of the author in portraying their own lives, as well as by the circumstances that constrain them. In this way, the suppression and marginalization of women within the film and animation industries intersects with that of female memoir and authorship, as both reveal more than the subject of the narrative they address. Male narratives of self and culture, as Helen Buss states in *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, are easily interrupted and dismantled by testifying women's truths, as the shameless opportunity for self-exploration through personal

²⁹ Century.

³⁰ Johnston, Claire. "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." Erens 133-143.

narrative exposes sexist and inauthentic portrayal of women in the cultural production and rhetoric surrounding animation.³¹ Women's autobiographical memoir naturally subverts the male center by centering the author herself, and therefore the female auteur animator does so while deconstructing, criticizing, and reinventing narrative aesthetics and the definition of animation.

Women's Memoir and Centering Self-identity

When writing memoir, it's as if you observe yourself in a window, both during the day as well as at night, in order to see yourself and your world from different perspectives: dark and light; surfaces and interiors.³²

—Sue William Silverman, *Mock Moons, Metaphor and Memory*

Memoir is a type of collage, less aligned with objective reality, and closer to a collected and assembled testimony of experiences, perspective, and assumption. In her essay on the psychological implications of writing personal narrative, Bahar Gholipour argues that the form of memoir requires that the author create distance between the narrative self and the self as a character or object within the story, resulting in a less emotional response to narrative investigation,³³ allowing the author to gain a more objective perspective of the past. However, American feminist author and film critic Molly Haskell argues that the emotional narrative—a response to storytelling often assigned to women's films in an attempt to discredit their experiences as factual³⁴—is

³¹ Buss, Helen M. (2002). *Repossessing the world: Reading memoirs by contemporary women*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

³² Silverman, Sue Williams. *Mock Moons, Metaphor, and Memory*. Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction. 2005.

³³ Gholipour.

³⁴ Mayne, 28.

far too often devalued and relegated to an “inferior” genre of narrative construction. Indeed, the concept of emotional as invalid completely contradicts the goals of memoir; the act of writing memoir and personal narrative, as Silverman explains, requires the complete observation of self. The testimony of personal experiences demands both surfaces and interiors—it seeks to both investigate cause and account for the effect.

Besides reflection, writing a memoir is a process of construction of selfhood; personal narratives act as rich resources for exploring the process of gendered identity. Therefore, women’s personal narratives explore the margins of narrative convention, highlighting the importance of the endless individual experiences of women and their relationship to and resistance of patriarchal norms. In adhering to the rules of the genre, women’s memoir and personal narrative recalibrates the male center, moving women from the margins into the narrative center of the story and, as writer Sari Botton argues, using their own experiences to illuminate subjects beyond the narrative self.³⁵ The truths of memoir lie in experiences that McCue argues to be intrinsically connected to cultural contexts,³⁶ it grants agency and gives representation to women through the production of cultural capital. The power of women’s memoir is that it both sits as an interdisciplinary and feminist practice of self-reflection, but that it exposes and recenters conventions of storytelling and testimony within the genre itself.

³⁵ Botton, Sorri. *Conversations with Women Braver Than Me: Vivian Gornick*. The Rumpus. 2010.

³⁶ McCue, Jennifer Anne. *Empowering the Female Voice: Interdisciplinarity, Feminism, and the Memoir*. *Journal of Integrated Studies*. 2014.

Animating a View: Ecstatic truth, Visual theory, and Argumentation

In Bosquin's *Memoir with a View: Discovering the Metaphor of Your Narrator's Experience*, she argues that the narrative self is something that is both shaped by and reflects the world it exists in. If the female animator, considering the history of the medium, does the same by creating animated film, then the product of animated memoir does twice the work—the medium and the genre both act as testimony, argumentation, and subversion from within their respective conventions. The truth that both attest to is what Werner Herzog called ecstatic truth;

There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization.³⁷

Animation, as a visual media, allows artists to express the internalization of both emotion and personal truth. As animator Inma Carpe explains, it provides an alternate language for communication that can illuminate poetic and ecstatic truths.³⁸ The stylization and response to superficial truth, the constructed, emotional acknowledgement of fact is the reason animation is so valuable for the genre of memoir; There is nothing objective about animation, and therefore, there can be no reasonable attempt to portray superficial truth, no opportunity for criticism in fabricating a lie—every animated narrative is fair game, and every animated personal reflection is valid.

The expectation that autobiographical work should be met with realism, verisimilitude, and fact isn't necessarily incorrect, but it is flawed. The truth of human

³⁷ Ebert, Roger. Herzog's Minnesota Declaration: Defining 'Ecstatic Truth'. Ebert Digital LLC. 1999.

³⁸ Carpe, Inma. Ecstatic Truth symposium: 'Defining the Essence of Animated Documentary'. Royal College of Art. 2014.

experience and process self-reflection is not grounded in objective reality, and animation is arguably the medium most suited to the genre. Animation is wholly constructed—everything included or left from the visual depiction of reality is a conscious choice, and thus the animator retains complete control of the story and the perspectives they intend to tell—by their natures, animation and memoir are persuasive.

In *The Rhetoric of Thick Representation: How pictures make the importance and strength of an argument salient* by Jens E. Kjeldsen, the author explores the ways in which images are unique in their ability to communicate and persuade. The value of images, Kjeldsen argues, is that they “provide a thick and rich description of the situation”³⁹ through visual detail, whereas verbalizations are more specific, but can be situationally and emotionally abstracted where they lack context. Thus an animator attempting to emphasize a point or perspective has the opportunity to restrict or shape the reality of the situation on screen by including or removing visual information within a story.

The Social Responsibility of the Animator

The lie of animation—the power of persuasion, abstraction, and argumentation that the medium holds—is not to be taken lightly. The social responsibility of the animator is to embrace the ecstatic truth—to acknowledge the falsities in the construction of a story, as well as the willingness of the viewer to suspend their disbelief in fiction to consume a narrative—and to use it as a tool to understand abstraction, not reality. The medium was conceived from the concept of illusion; the

³⁹ Kjeldsen, Jens E. “The Rhetoric of Thick Representation: How Pictures Render the Importance and Strength of an Argument Salient.” *Argumentation*, vol. 29, no. 2, 22 May 2014. *University of Windsor*.

imitation and abstraction of life and movement and the visualization of emotion and feeling, and it's inability to portray reality is its virtue. The critique of animated films, and the refusal to passively consume animation is the only way to understand the complexity, history, and value of animation as an artistic medium.

Critique

The following critique within the context of my thesis serves to explore the animated films of female auteurs that fall under genres of memoir, personal, and autobiographical narratives in order to establish a framework for which narrative animation can be analyzed through the integration of both visual and sociocultural theory and history. In the introduction of *Beyond Critique: Different Ways of Talking about Art*, Susan Walters Eller warns against critique as evaluation;⁴⁰ the concept of measuring these films and their success as defined by their deviation from a particular standard is the cause the marginalization of women's memoir and animation at its core. Thus this critique intends to look at the combination of both the construction and visual representation of narrative within the films from a feminist perspective; it explores the product and form as argumentation, manipulation, and communication.

Persepolis (2007)

Marjane Satrapi's 2007 adaptation of her graphic memoir *Persepolis* explores personal narrative through an exploration of gender, sexuality, and culture in Islam. The auteurism of her production is unique—though she illustrated and wrote the graphic

⁴⁰ Ellers, Susan Walters. *Beyond Critique: Different Ways of Talking About Art*. Mica Press, Maryland. 2013.

novel herself, the animated film required assistance for production, editing, and animating.⁴¹ She directed the film alongside Vincent Paronnaud, yet ensured that the film maintained the integrity of her auteur work.

Stylistically, her approach to her own Bildungsroman appears childish at first. Yet, as the audience is introduced to her characters and her family slowly and gently, revealing carefully—in the same way an adult must do for a child—the tragedies and challenges she faced growing up among the backdrop of the Iranian revolution, we are thankful for the childlike facade of the film, which helps to shield us from the gravity and danger of her childhood. Satrapi's story follows her interest in feminism as a child—her romanticisation of the powerful female figures in her life and her quest for equality are all integral to her memoir. Yet her approach to illustrating and animating the differences between fantasy and reality are what makes her film subversive. Her choice of medium, bathed in industrial entertainment and Western consumption, only emphasizes the importance of animation to the story—Satrapi utilizes childish, Western conventions of cartooning to subvert the forces her character so desperately means to escape, presenting childish fantasy in contrast to stark reality through caricature and abstraction.

In *Persepolis*, Marjane's character, Marji, struggles to adhere to the behavioral demands of Islam during the Islamic revolution. On the streets, Marji fears police officers and women in hijabs who act as agents to the dictatorship; her caricature-like portrayal of them only further aligns her with Western sensibilities of thought. By

⁴¹ Sony Pictures. *The Making of: Persepolis*. 2007.

illustrating them as homogenous identities, slithering around the screen like snakes, Satrapi emphasizes both her fear and childlike understanding of her own situation.

Though Marjane illustrates the backdrops to the city using stark, square objects and rigid blocks of dark gray, her use of fluid and abstract shapes provides a completely different perspective for Marji. As Marji constantly inquires about her family history she romanticizes her family stories, allowing her imagination to swirl with fluid images of flowers, waves and clouds. These scenes exist without settings, abstracting landscapes and spaces which both suggesting opportunity for fun, far from the law and order of the dictatorship. Her use of this contrast between abstract and representational both illuminate and separate her experiences growing up during the Islamic revolution to help us understand Satrapi's perspective more clearly. Her relationship with her childhood is complex, but she grants the audience the opportunity to find both joy, humor, and pleasure in a cultural narrative so often paired with fear and oppression. Her chosen medium subverts the systems from which she so clearly wanted to escape, and thus her ability and opportunity to tell her own story in *Persepolis* challenges both the political and material systems from which she was born into, escaped, and continues to overturn with her work.

Rocks in my Pocket (2014)

In Latvian animator Signe Baumanė's extremely truthful and devastating film, *Rocks in My Pocket*, the auteur follows her own discovery of family secrets, while following the gendered culture and stigma surrounding mental health in 20th-Century Latvia. Her approach to dealing with her consumption of identity within the line of women in her family is met with humor and experimentation.

The uniqueness of her multi-media animation mimics a vivid dream—her illustrations provide surreal insight to things so often left unaddressed. Her willingness to tackle depression and to expose the stories of other women in her family dealing with mental illness only speak to her commitment to sharing these stories. Her ability to communicate issues of intervention, abuse, and illness through gentle, careful images and illustrations seems to make her exploration of self easier—what begins as fear of self becomes the basis for understanding and bonding within her family. Her independent action on the film follows few conventions of linear storytelling, and the narrative exploration of self in her work not only identifies the injustices that the women in her family have consistently endured, but emphasizes the marginality of the spaces her film occupies; as she states in an interview, her work is “am not constrained by industry rules and expectations”—women in animation exist outside the game.⁴²

⁴² Silverstein, Melissa. “Signe Baumann Boldly Animates Family Depression in ‘Rocks in My Pockets’”. Indie Wire. 2014.

Chapter 3: The Creative Project

I am extremely honored to be an animator. I feel very privileged to be able to pursue art, to create work, and to grow with the help of my peers, professors, and community. I believe transparency from artists is extremely important; the opportunity to make work independently, to share my own stories, and speak to consumers of media about the intentions and outcomes of a project honestly is the privilege of complete creative freedom, and for that I am extremely grateful. I believe it is my responsibility as an artist to speak openly about my goals, intentions, and failures, as my animations are a reflection of self just as much as my personal narratives are. My hope is that explaining, critiquing, and reflecting on my process and my piece I can better understand my own choices and impulses as a female animator in response to my own influences and understanding of the medium.

This section will consist of 1) an explanation of the development of the narrative and my technical process, 2) an investigation of my approach to illustrating, writing, and revising as a process that involves research, as well as a scene-by-scene critique and 3) a reflection and response to my film and my practice as it sits within my thesis project as a whole.

Narrative and Technical Goals and Processes

My ideas have never come out of thin air. I loved to write stories when I was younger, but they all seemed extremely standardized in narrative conventions; A comic I wrote in third grade about three super-animals fighting littering bad guys seemed like a combination of *Winnie the Pooh*, *Totally Spies*, and *Captain Planet*. I wasn't very

well-read, but I watched a lot of cable television and animated movies as a child. Looking back now, I found that I have relied on characters within film and animation to frame how I understood myself and my own stories, finding inspiration and encouragement from characters like Kiki from *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), Mulan from *Mulan* (1998), and Katara from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005). I was excited about all of these characters; their strength, femininity, kindness, and intelligence allowed me to find role models of the screen. However their stories, filled with adventure and magic, were never my own. After struggling with my identity and having difficulty connecting with others throughout my early undergraduate years, I turned to writing my own stories to communicate the personal narratives from my life which made me feel inspired—creating short films that tackled loss, fear, and identity through art metaphor gave me time to meditate and reflect on the challenges I was facing in my real life, and in some ways, finding solutions to the creative, narrative, and technical problems gave me both a finished project, closure, and a way to share my thoughts and interests with my peers.

Goals

The film itself began as a practical solution to a problem—I needed to think of a long-term creative project for my thesis that would provide opportunities for research and investigation. I felt strongly that I could create a project that would be large enough that it could be the product of over a year of work, because I had made so many smaller films before, and the time I had spent on other films inspired me to further improve my process. Animated film showcased the interdisciplinarity of my department and education, requiring the ability to execute a range of skills I had learned in different

studios and presented the chance to learn and gain experience in new software and workflows I hadn't been able to familiarize myself with. Animation as a medium was a strong subject for investigation, as I hadn't had the chance to do research on the medium specifically within any of my classes, and I was interested in contributing to the historiography of visual arts as I focused my other research projects on representation and identity in art history. This thesis, both as a creative project and a paper, began as a way for me to use research as a path to making "better work". It felt very straightforward at first, but as I decided to tackle a more complex narrative in an attempt to organize a very personal and fluid set of memories, things became much more complicated; My definition of "better work" changed drastically, and the project became more difficult to create, more interesting to investigate, and most importantly, more valuable to my understanding my practice and the medium.

Inspiration

I visited Scandinavia the summer of 2016 to spend some time traveling alone and taking art classes. Halfway through the summer, I headed south to Denmark for an all ages art camp and Illustration course at an animation school in Viborg that I admired—the Summer Animation course had hit capacity but the incredible instructor for the Illustration course, Signe Parkins, challenged the way I thought about illustration and composition, changing my understanding and use of art and image-making in a single week. It was an extremely transformative, intensive course, and I became extremely close with the other students in my classes, forming some of the closest bonds I had made since I began college. We supported each others work, helped each

other grow, and as we left the workshop, said teary goodbyes and promised to stay in touch.

I grew extremely close with one of my classmates, Mark. He and his mom were visiting Denmark from Hong Kong to spend time with his father's side of the family, who were from out of town. His mom was taking the Life Drawing course and Mark signed up for the same Illustration course as mine, although he didn't seem too excited about or comfortable with his drawing skills. On the first day, I struck up a conversation with him and his mom, in attempt to break the nervous tension that we felt as new students felt upon arrival. Everyone at the camp slept in dorms on campus, so Mark and I spent any time that we weren't working on our projects for our courses hanging out with other students, and exploring the city. I can't remember why we connected so immediately—perhaps it was because we were both Asian and from outside Europe, so we felt a bit foreign, as about 80% of the students there were from Denmark and around Scandinavia. Mark and I took the class very seriously, but throughout the week we were also playing sports, goofing off, and enjoying our vacation. Because so many of the campers were younger than me (I was 21, most others were between 15 and 20) except for a few middle-aged campers, I felt a lot of freedom to goof off and be myself around Mark and my classmates, and the camp fostered a very friendly and open environment. By the end of the week, Mark had become like a younger brother to me, and though he often acted irresponsibly in ways that would annoy me, we had bonded so quickly and easily that I brushed them off and chalked it up to immaturity.

I had never had a friend from another part of the world, but Mark and I pledged to stay in close contact when the workshop ended. I had never felt so sad to leave

someone—we only had spent a week together but had grown so close, and though in some ways we felt like our friendship was shallow and underdeveloped, we had been very honest, supportive, and kind to each other in that time. We continued to update each other on the events and people we had talked about while we were together, and painted more clear pictures of our own lives to the other through text messages and the occasional photo message. However, communication was never as clear or consistent as we had been hoping it would be, as the time difference always meant we were never able to have a long conversation. We missed updates, forgot to return messages, and eventually lost contact.

I wanted to memorialize this relationship in film—it at times felt picturesque and heartwarming, but other times it felt futile and immature. Neither of us blamed each other, and perhaps we had made assumptions about the importance and depth of our friendship, but that didn't mean it wasn't sad to reflect on the ways a close relationship so quickly appeared and disappeared. More upsetting to me was the way I saw my relationship change after we went back home— Mark seemed less mature and less sincere, and I questioned if I was ever important to him as a friend and confidant. These impressions reminded me of the problems I had identified in his behavior during our week in Denmark, and I questioned whether I had been too desperate for the opportunity for companionship so far away from home after a few weeks of solitary traveling. All of this—the reflection, potential for regret, pessimism, and self-doubt—prevented me from reflecting positively on what I had originally counted as a week of fun and friendship. The ways my memories and miscommunication shaped past events seemed disheartening and sad, and I placed blame on both of us for our inability to

maintain a friendship. Looking back, the assumption that we would have stayed close after we moved home seemed a bit too optimistic, and my expectations about our what our friendship should look like led to disappointment, distrust, and disillusionment.

This piece wasn't created to criticize Mark, but instead to speak to the power and consequence of memory—the ways that I have shaped my attitudes and emotions by selective memory. I wanted to tell a personal narrative that would explore empathy, memory, relationships, and sentimentality. At the time of its conception, this story felt extremely raw and emotionally fragile. However by the end of the project—over a year later—it provided an opportunity of me to look back at who I was during the time that I wrote it and to explore the emotional and sentimental journey the process had caused. I wanted to investigate the reasons I felt insecure in such a positive and productive friendship and use that to build narrative—the alternative time zones and the opportunity to write non-linear narratives was exciting, as the concept of inconsistency was present within both the relationship and within my emotional response to it. The project presented enough challenges for me as a writer and an animator, and my interest in the narrative gave it a certain urgency that inspired me to write.

Building a Non-linear Narrative Structure

Because I wanted to present this non-linearly, I began by watching other films and looking at other ways animators and filmmakers approach inconsistency in sequences without confusing audiences as to the storyline. I separated the story into a timeline with three sections; 1) the week in Denmark, 2) a single night where my character (I named her Jane to be able to distinguish between me as an author and my character self) was texting Mark and trying to communicate with him in an effort to



maintain the friendship, and 3) the narrative present. Scenes from Section 1 and Section 2 would alternate, and Jane's mood and emotional state in Section 2 would change in response to the events of the Section 1. Because Section 1 was part of the past, it could either be interpreted as a memory, or as a dream, as Section 2 takes place during the nighttime. During the scenes in Section 1, a voicemail from the narrative present plays, where Jane attempts to reach Mark. This gives the Jane more agency as a character, and gives the audience greater insight to her emotional relationship to Mark, as they are being offered verbal statements that illustrate her sentiments towards him. However, it isn't until the end of the film when the narrative present is established visually for the audience and the context of the voicemail is made clear. Throughout the film, the audience is tasked with the responsibility to establish the relationship between the characters across multiple settings and verbal narratives, reflecting and responding in the same way Jane does, attempting to understand her relationship to Mark. *Difficult Empathy: The Effect of Narrative Perspective on Readers' Engagement with a First-Person Narrator*, by Caspar J. van Lissa, identifies "empathetic perspective-taking" as the most effective approach to getting audiences to relate to a fictional character.⁴³ At the end of the film, the audience is brought into the narrative present, the narrative becomes less subjective, no longer leaning towards Jane's perspective. The audience is required to resolve the relationship themselves, no longer forced into empathy for

⁴³ Lissa, Caspar J. van / Caracciolo, Marco / Duuren, Thom van / Leuveren, Bram van: "Difficult Empathy. The Effect of Narrative Perspective on Readers' Engagement with a First-Person Narrator". In: DIEGESIS. Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research / Interdisziplinäres E-Journal für Erzählforschung 5.1 (2016). 43-63.

Jane’s perspective, and are prompted to question the objectivity of the preceding narrative.

Technical Process

After the story is developed, the narrative is written and revised many times, and the sequence of scenes is decided, I begin the storyboarding process. This initial development takes the form of notes, timelines, doodles and ideas for scenes and narrative devices, while the storyboards take the form of thumbnail images that show the basic poses and compositions of each scene. I begin the storyboarding process by dividing the narrative into sequences, into a document called a “Shot List” (Table 1), in order to decide what must happen visually in each sequence to communicate events clearly.

Scene	Description	Audio	Boards
Section 1 0:11 0:51 40s	<p>1.1 Walking uphill, J follows behind M</p> <p>1.2 Establishing shots of surrounding areas.</p> <p>1.3 Establishing shots of surrounding areas.</p> <p>1.4 M is ahead of J and waits for her to catch up</p> <p>1.5 Close up, M waits, but the second she arrives he decides to go on ahead</p> <p>1.6 Close on J, she is pretty tired and takes a moment to catch her breath, a bit annoyed with M.</p>	Voicemail audio, beginning of first voicemail.	
Section 2 0:52 1:21 29s	<p>2.1 The phone buzzes to end scene 1. Camera pans to see J asleep in bed, She wakes up and rolls over to look at phone.</p> <p>2.2 Blinded by the phone light, she seems tired but excited to see the message displayed on the phone</p>	N/A	


	<p>2.3 She is seen from above, alone in the room. She seems focused on the light of her phone, consumed with what is on the screen and turned away from the audience. She lays her phone down on the bedside table and rolls over to fall back asleep.</p>	
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Table 1: Shot list of the first two scenes.

The shot list begins with a scene number (1, 2, 3...) and a general description of the scene, and then each scene is divided into shots (1.1, 1.2, 1.3...) which includes vague blocking⁴⁴ instructions. This is done for the entire film. Then, I roughly storyboard the entire film on paper, loosely blocking the movements of the characters to help myself visualize the fluidity between scenes and sequences. Once rough storyboards and compositions are developed, I recreate the sequences digitally in Adobe Photoshop on a timeline so that they play in sequence. My goal is to gain a rough estimate of the timing of the film; If the narrative and scenes too long to play though, unnecessary scenes should be cut before I spend time animating them or developing them further. I keep the shot list updated with storyboards and sequence lengths as a reference and guide for myself.

Once I have revised the rough storyboards, I rewatch the edited version and use a timer to determine how long I should spend on each scene, keeping character actions, motives, and environmental establishing shots in mind. I use those times to create a rough animatic over the digital storyboards. The rough animatic includes the key gestures and props in time, and serves as an outline for the final animatic. It helps

⁴⁴ The term “blocking” refers to the position of the character in the space and within the frame.

establish more refined timing and movements, and identifies any discontinuities in character placement or actions that I forgot to address in the timed storyboard sequences. Figure 1 compares a storyboarded still from the film and its corresponding still frame from the rough animatic.



Figure 1: A storyboarded image (left) and a rough animation still (right) for the same scene.

I continue to refine the rough animatic until it clearly illustrates the characters, their actions and emotions, and where they are in a setting or space. Once the rough animated is refined enough to begin pose-to-pose animation, I begin creating the final animations using Video Layers and Video Group Layers within Photoshop.

I've spent my undergrad developing a workflow for making basic animation that is based on the principles and construction of traditional cel animation. Cel animation is a frame-by-frame technical approach to animation, where each frame is hand drawn and colored onto a thin plastic sheet (acetate), and when the cel is over layed on a background and switched out, it creates the illusion of a moving object or character on a static background (Figure 2). I reproduce this process digitally using two programs primarily; Adobe Photoshop to paint backgrounds and draw cels, and Adobe After Effects (AE) to composite the film.

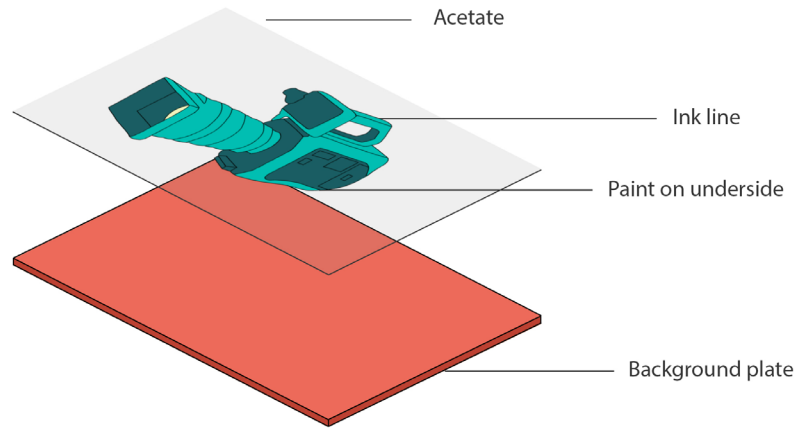


Figure 2: Illustration of acetate cel used for animation.⁴⁵

Using the rough animatic, I first outline the backgrounds for each scene. It is important to develop the environment first in trying to reach a certain level of realism, so that the character can move realistically within the space. Just as we enter rooms in real life and move and interact with them according to placement of furniture and objects, it makes sense to create environments before specifying the movements of the characters within the space. I outline the backgrounds first before coloring them to preserve consistency in the line work and style of the environment (Figure 3). I then create a color key—a document that includes groups of color swatches to be used as the primary color schemes for scenes or sets of scenes—I can use color to track the overall use of atmospheric color schemes and therefore the emotional development of the protagonist throughout the story. I wanted to environments surrounding Jane to change with her mood, so I used pale and softer colors within Section 1 to make them seem

⁴⁵ “Side Project - Cel Animation in Photoshop.” No Magnolia, 26 July 2017, nomagnolia.tv/side-project-cel-animation-photoshop/.

more distant, and more saturated colors with higher contrast within Section 2 to add immediacy and poignancy to the relatively still, quiet room. Section 3 used warmer, more saturated, lower contrast colors to combine the visual styles of Sections 1 and 2, referencing the color schemes of sunsets to signify closure, while suggesting that the story must continue past the end of the film.

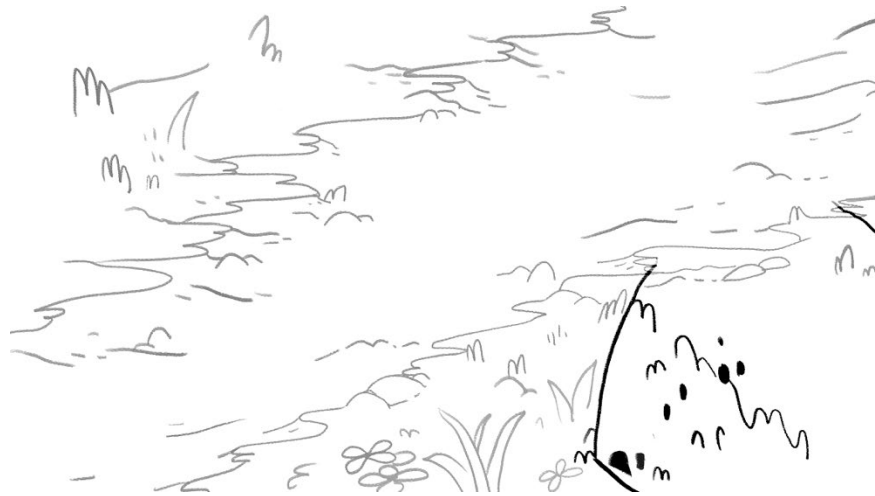


Figure 3: Outlined background without color or animatic overlaid.

Once the backgrounds are designed, I create a new Photoshop document to create the outlines of the animatic, using the background to place the character within the environment, and adhering to the character models I designed for the project (Figure 4, Figure 5). Having a model established for each character makes it more straightforward to animate—I have already established the postures, proportions, and designs of each character, allowing me to be more consistent through the animation process. I animate frame by frame with “Video Layers” on a timeline. Photoshop allows you to establish a video timeline using the “Timeline” panel, where you can set a frame rate for your animation. I animated this film at 12 frames per second, meaning that for every second of animation, there are 12 different drawings. However in scenes where

the characters or objects are still or doing repetitive movements, frames can be repeated and duplicated, requiring fewer unique frames. I use the pose-to-pose method of animating, as opposed to the straight-ahead method. This allows me to use the rough animatic and the most important gestures or blocked poses, create a handful of detailed and correctly proportioned key frames, and then to animate movement between them. This maintains consistency, emphasizes key expressions, and ensures that the timing I outline in the rough animatic is accurate after the scenes are animated. The outlining process for the animations took over five months, with about 8 minutes of finished animated outlines completed.

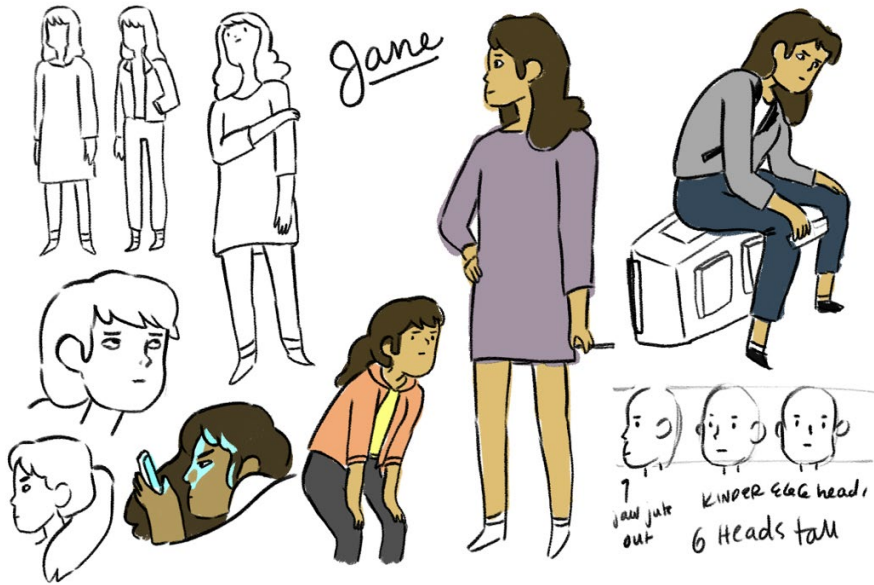


Figure 4: Character model sheet for Jane.

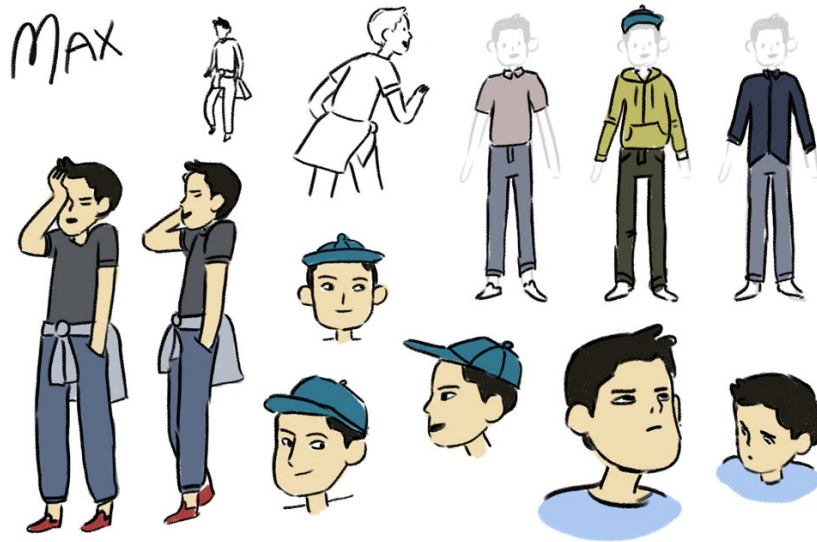


Figure 5: Character model sheet for Mark (previously named Max).

After the outlines are completed (Figure 6), I use the colored backgrounds to color the characters appropriately for the lighting and environments established through the background color key (Figure 7). The stills in Figure 8 show the color variations of the different sections; In Scene 1.6, Jane's skin and clothes seem pale and washed out to match the light and soft environment, whereas in Scene 4.1, her skin appear darker and more saturated within her room at night. Scene 9.10 incorporates the saturated colors of Section 2 and the less dramatic contrast from Section 1, bathing the character and the interior of the environment in light pinks and magentas.



Figure 6: Outlined animation cel.



Figure 7: Colored and outlined animation cel.



Figure 8: Scenes 1.6, 4.1, and 9.10

Once every cel is colored and every background is painted digitally, I composite all of the scenes using Adobe AE. I combine the outlines and the filled color of the

animated cels to create png sequences, exported from Photoshop; I export the colored images into folders as pngs, retaining an alpha (transparent) layer on the images so they essentially become a digital version of a stack of acetate cels. Every animation file, background, and png folder follows a naming convention that ties them to the numbered scene, making the shot list a valuable reference for organization. For example, Scene 1.5 includes a background file (“BG 1.5”) that is composed of multiple layers (“BG 1.5 front tree”; “BG 1.5 mid tree”; “BG 1.5 background”), a png sequence for each character (“PS 1.5 mark”; “PS 1.5 jane”). The Photoshop files which were used to make the animations for the png sequences followed the same convention (“AN 1.5 jane” for the outline, and “CC 1.5 jane” for the colored in cels). The backgrounds are constructed similarly to the cels within the files, so that “BG 1.5 front tree” and “BF 1.5 mid tree” can be separated in AE. These files don’t have to be exported as png sequences because AE can import Photoshop layers as a composition, yet it isn’t compatible with video layers and timelines in Photoshop.

Each shot is composed slightly differently, but Scene 5.2 (Figure 9) is a good example of a simple layered composition, and I will explain the process using that scene. The main composition is called “C 5.2” and acts as a stage to import the elements that will make up the scene, and I set the dimensions of new compositions to always be 1920 by 1080 pixels and the framerate to be 24 frames per second (fps). After creating the main composition, I import the background file. “BG 5.2.psd” is imported into AE, where it becomes a composition called “BG 5.2” with the same dimensions as the Photoshop file, and the framerate is 24 fps. The background composition “BG 5.2” consists of two layers, “BG 5.2 background” and “BG 5.2 wall”, where the “BG 5.2

background” is the flat image furthest away from the viewer, representing the floor, wall, the paper on the wall, and the table against the wall, and “BG 5.2 wall” is the front wall/doorway that separates the exterior of the room where Jane walks, and the interior of the room where Mark hangs the paper. When the composition “BG 5.2” is imported into “C 5.2”, and can be manipulated independently of one another within the program. After the background layers are imported into the composition, I import the png sequence “CC 5.2 mark” into the main composition and change the framerate from the default 24 fps to 12 fps, and place the sequence—which plays within the timeline as the assigned fps—between “BG 5.2 background” and “BG 5.2 wall” so that Mark appears to be standing in the room. I do the same for “CC 5.2 jane” and place her in front of the “BG 5.2 wall” layer so that she appears outside of the room. The layer order of the finished composition is arranged as follows;

- CC 5.2 jane (png sequence)
- BG 5.2 wall (Photoshop layer)
- CC 5.2 mark (png sequence)
- BG 5.2 background (Photoshop layer)

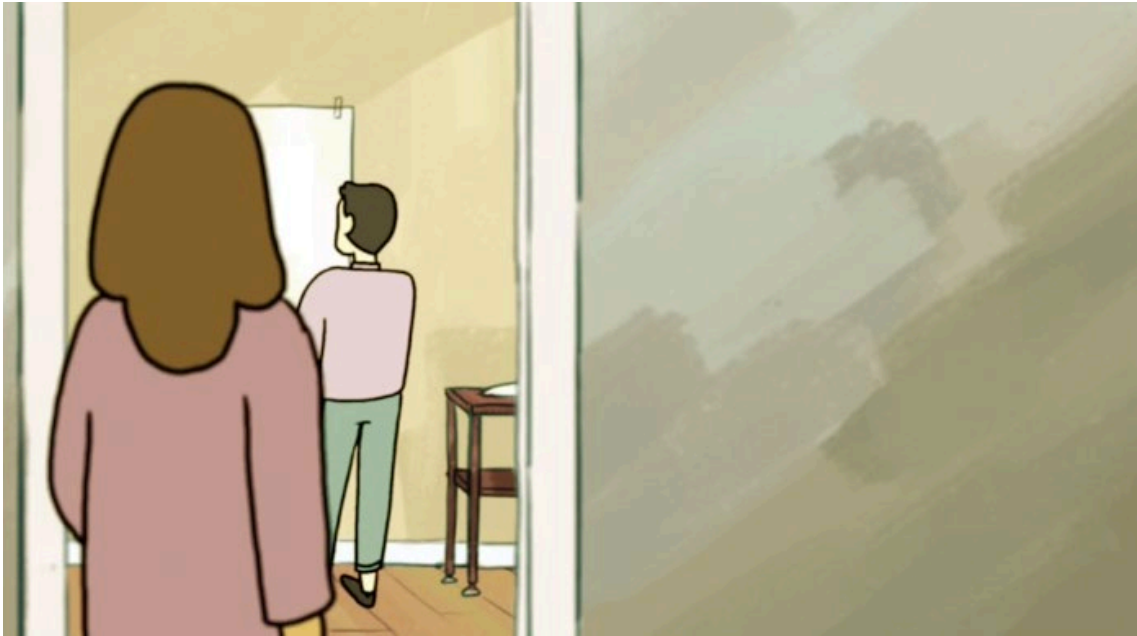


Figure 9: A still from scene 5.2, consisting of layers “CC 5.2 jane”, “BG 5.2 wall”, “CC 5.2 mark”, and “BG 5.2 background”.

Although Mark never moves behind the front wall in this scene, I carefully arrange the layers within the main composition so that I can create the illusion of depth using 3D layers. In using 3D layers, every layer in the composition can be assigned a z-coordinate in addition to the 2D x- and y-coordinates, allowing the layers to appear closer or farther from the audience within the 3D composition. The perspective of the audience is established by using a Camera layer, where the illusion of depth is created by turning on “Depth of Field” within the camera setting and adjusting the “Aperture” within the Camera layer settings. This will make it appear as if the camera is focusing on a single layer, or focusing on a certain distance. In Scene 5.2, the focus begins on Mark hanging up the paper. As he steps back, the focus shifts to the outside wall, signaling that something is about to happen outside the room. Jane steps into the frame, and the focus shifts back to Mark. The shift in focus requires a change in the Depth of Field attribute on the layer, which can be achieved by creating key frames on the

timeline. The use of 3D layers, Depth of Field, and Aperture not only make the environments and characters seem more realistic, but guide the viewer by literally focusing on the most important parts of the scene.

After the sub-scenes are composited, sorted into their larger scenes, compiled together, and further edited and refined to ensure that they transition smoothly and clearly, the sound and Foley effects are recorded, edited, and placed throughout the film to help create environmental atmosphere. When the sound is added, additional editing and arrangement of the visual effects must be done to ensure that the sound fits with movement, and that it doesn't distract, but rather clarifies each scene.

Creating *Mark* and Self Critique

I knew when I began the film that it would require a lengthy process of revisions, cuts, and entire changes in script and story. The variant success of films I had created in the past spoke to my strengths and weaknesses as an auteur animator. *The Gardener*, a 3 minute film I created the summer of 2015 without dialogue was sweet and sad, laced with metaphors of loss and life. It was thoroughly boarded, planned, and produced. *Seaglass*, a 12 minute film I created the winter of 2016 was filled with cliché dialogue and narrative arcs which proved my weaknesses as a writer, and the quality of the drawings diminished as the quantity increased due to poor planning. For *Mark*, my hope was that I could combine the emotional and visual strengths of *The Gardener*, as well as the lessons I had learned in time-management and story-writing in *Seaglass*. This meant that the most important factor in making the film would be timeline—there was time that should be devoted to story development, time for initial production, and time for post-production and revisions. Time and resources are rarely on the auteur's

side, and though I feel anxious about the prospect that more time would have made the film more clear, consistent, or beautiful, I think that the current version of the film speaks to my original intent, and I am proud of the choices I have made.

Style and Stylistic Influences

Because animation is first and foremost a visual medium, beginning a critique by examining the visual style of the film can be useful, as every other quality of animation—composition, timing, movement—relies on the visual style of the film to guide them. Animation requires intentional construction, presenting a mediated reality to the viewer that the characters and story live within. To tell a personal narrative, my goal wasn't to perfectly imitate human and architectural form, but to suggest that the environments and the characters could exist and behave consistently within their own universe. I wanted to simplify the characters to make them more relatable, but to make their relationship extremely nuanced and specific to prevent the film from seeming generic. Ultimately, my goal was to stylistically achieve consistency and realism in the behaviors and environments through which the story was being told, so that the viewer could both relate to and detach from the narrative when they felt it was appropriate, giving them the same level of agency as the characters have—making them choose whether or not to emotionally invest in the relationships and situations on the screen.

In the past few years, I have developed an illustrative style inspired by other women working in illustration and animation. Artists like Hellen Jo, Aisha Franz, and Natasha Allegri have majorly influenced my style of illustration; As I have sought out the work of female animators of color, I have found incredible diversity of style which all aim to represent women of color (WOC) as individuals. I struggled for a long time

with animated images of WOC in film throughout my childhood, so my confidence and growing stylistic consistency for my own work has been largely the result of more WOC coming into the spotlight in the industry. When I first started the concept art for the characters, I made Jane Filipina, and Mark Japanese, as he and I both talked so much about race and Asianness, and I wanted to the characters to reflect that part of our relationship. However, after considering their designs, my impulse was to make one of the characters white. This was not only to help dissociate the characters as potential relatives (as Mark and I are both Asian and have similar skin tones), but to make the characters more accessible to white audiences. This felt standard to me, as I had learned by consuming film that a cast of non-white characters implied racial stereotypes might be present within the film. Because Mark and Jane would never bring up race in the conversation, it seemed unimportant to make them both brown. The cultural fictions that saturate media had me convinced that racial representation—while championed and celebrated—was dangerous; my fear of disengaging white audiences due to the lack of white representation in the film led me to question whether or not my character should reflect myself, or if the message of the film would be more accessible for everyone if the characters were white instead of racially ambiguous. After speaking with my peers and family about this choice within the film, all of them felt that it was important that I use my original designs. For a long time, I felt extremely guilty for wanting to erase Jane and Mark's identities and forgo Asian representation to make the film easier for non-diverse audiences. Just because people of color had been traditionally erased or tokenized in film, my instinct was to continue the tradition and remove the characters, thus removing the pieces of their identities which were extremely important to me, the

development of the story, and other people of color looking for representation on the screen. This guilt was only present within my process—I am aware that artists of color struggle with this conflict every day. We are told to fearlessly bring diversity to the screen, yet feel pressure to adhere to the overwhelming presence of whiteness in animation which has been established as convention. I felt grateful for my peers and their support during the creation of the film, and for the opportunity to illustrate characters of color how I saw fit for my narrative.

In a critique of the film during my BFA Winter Term reviews, it was pointed out that throughout the film, Jane's skin tone seems inconsistent. Professor of Comic Studies, Tara Fickle, who connected the visual style of my work to traditions of Japanese animation, noted that Jane's skin seemed much darker in Sections 2 and 3 than in Section 1. While this was not intentional, she suggested that the fluctuation of her skin tone could be misread as a representation of her sense of self-worth—in scenes where she feels more averse to her relationship with Mark, she feels more comfortable in her own skin and thus her skin tone is darker. While this was completely unintentional and the inconsistency in skin tone was due to the color keys (please reference Figure 8), I think the effect is powerful so long as it isn't distracting. It's true that her skin is much lighter in Section 1, and I think the pale, washed-out figures accurately illustrate the coldness and distance between the characters during these sections.

Close Reading the Narrative Construction of Mark

I was interested in using montage for the film because of my recent work in comics. Comics, which utilizes sequences of static images, recalled the formal use of

montage in film—the act of cutting together two independent scenes or ideas and juxtaposing them by placing them next to each other, thus creating a third meaning or idea by emphasizing their relationship. In the essay, *Defining the Essence of an Animated Documentary* by Leah Fusco, she explains that animation, as a drawn visual narrative, can capture alternative timeframes and reading of place.⁴⁶ Because I was so interested in exploring this narrative of memory and change, animation and the use of montage seemed like the best way to present alternative timeframes and attitudes towards specific characters and or unique settings and events. Because I knew the understanding of Section 2 relied on the unfolding of events in Section 1, I wanted to switch off between the sections frequently, which would suggest that they were tied, and would cause the audience to seek out the relationship between them. My hope would be that through the first half of the film, where Section 1 and Section 2 would alternate, it would appear that the protagonist was struggling to retain agency, allowing her memories to effect the way she made decisions in Section 2. However, Section 3 would help the character gain agency by allowing her to exist solely in the narrative present. Her decision to avoid conflict with Mark in her voicemail would suggest irresolution, but the physical distance between them at the end would imply that she had met emotional resolve; The sequence of events and juxtaposition of scenes acts as visual metaphor for Jane’s choice to distance herself mentally from the emotional labor of their relationship.

⁴⁶ Fusco, Leah. Ecstatic Truth symposium: ‘Defining the Essence of Animated Documentary’. Royal College of Art. 2014

In Mayne's essay, she argues that narrative conventions of time and space are extremely gendered in film. She points to Claudine Herrmann's suggestion that historically in written and film narrative, male portrayals of the female experience of time and space are extremely linear, mirroring the material continuity of women's daily lives as, whereas men "assume the function of discontinuity, discovery, change in all its forms"⁴⁷ in their own narratives. This affirms the importance of women's authorship in their own representation, not only because the inherent risk of the continued misunderstanding and isolation of women's perspectives in film without women's authorship, but because perpetuating the assumption that there are differentiating functions in the narrative minds of male and female authors is harmful, sexist, and dangerous for the audiences consuming these narratives. The use of the segmented and non-linear narratives in my film is not defined by masculinity in any way; The historic suppression of women's authorship in film contributes to the concept that certain narrative structures are only applicable to masculine characters and perspectives, causing inaccurate and unbalanced representation of women in film.

My attempt to lead the audience to the narrative present by creating a short set of voicemails—one which presented Jane as filled with regret, doubt, and anger, and the other in which she decidedly concealed the issues she had previously wanted to address—was originally conceived as a method to clarify some of Jane's feelings towards Mark. While I loved the ambiguity of the contrasting first two sections, their relationship seemed frustratingly vague and unresolved without Jane's actual verbal testimony. The voicemails, as unambiguous verbal statements, were argumentative,

⁴⁷ Mayne, 36.

while the visual information, as imprecise visual images, contradicted the tone of the voicemails. The combination of both “thick and rich”⁴⁸ arguments through the combination of visual and verbal narratives provides contrasting information which challenges the viewer throughout the story to reconcile the events in Section 1 and 2. Because I knew that Section 1 would be particularly engaging and overstimulating, I knew that Section 2 should stand in extremely stark contrast if I wanted the audience to have any time at all to process the information in the previous scene. For this reason, I left the scenes in Section 2 almost completely silent, reminiscent of the eerie quietness and aloneness that one has after they wake up from a particularly vivid dream. The hyper-awareness the audience has of Jane’s movements, reactions, and emotions in these moments are extremely important; the non-verbal communication and empathy she creates with her audience due to these human idiosyncrasies is what filmmaker Chantal Akerman explains to be an extremely feminist technique in filmmaking.⁴⁹ The attention to the small gestures of women in film is considered the “lowest in the hierarchy of film images,”⁵⁰ because it gives time and gravity to gestures which historically have been denied in favor of exaggerated, oversexualized images of women’s bodies. My goal with these scenes with Jane was to give her more agency, to help the build empathy and intrigue for the audience, and give both the viewer and the protagonist time to process, respond, and rest.

⁴⁸ Kjeldsen, 3.

⁴⁹ Mayne 36.

⁵⁰ Mayne, 36.

Scene-by-Scene Analysis

The scene-by scene reflection and critique is divided into sections, and aims to explain the artistic choices I've made within the scene itself. An * indicates a scene that has been omitted from the film.

Scene 1

Scene	Description	Reflection and Critique
1.1	0:05 Fade into a path with a rock. One person runs past, followed by another, slower person.	I wanted to begin by introducing the setting as a positive space; The sunny path illuminates the beauty of the environment, while it also suggests that we are entering this story somewhere in the middle of the narrative. We are joining the journey after it has started, and thus we will have to try to understand the development of the relationship between the two people from this point on.
1.2	0:19 Establishing Shot	
1.3	0:23 Establishing Shot	These establishing shots are made to indicate time passing, and to further establish the environment for the audience. Because the camera is high in the trees (among the canopy) we assume that the characters are moving higher uphill.
1.4	0:26 Mark runs up the hill, turns around to slow, and waits.	The expectation is that because the camera is so far out, we will soon see the second set of footsteps follow. However, we can sense that this is not the case when he slows and waits, possibly irritated as he puts his hand on his hip. Still, this indicates that the two have a positive relationship, as he at first walks backwards to see if she's coming, then slows as he realizes she is far behind.
1.5	0:35 Mark waits, facing away from the audience. Jane follows and takes a break, so Mark, annoyed, leaves her behind once again.	This is the first time we are introduced to Mark. He towers over the spot where Jane comes in, and immediately turns from her once she has caught up. We see that he is impatient and annoyed, and that due to her placement on the screen, she feels belittled and inadequate. Though their motives are vague, we can immediately establish the relationship between the two characters through the tension and imbalance in the frame.
1.6	0:43	This is the first time we are really introduced to Jane and are able to empathize with her. She is immediately seen as the "underdog," unfairly left behind. Because the

	Jane wipes the sweat from her brow and sighs.	audience also wants to keep up with Mark to see where he is going, we empathize with Jane in her inability to keep up. We are brought physically closer to her, and are forced to remain by her side, and thus our emotional distance from Mark grows as his physical distance from her increases.
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Scene 1 introduces the conflict of the entire film, although the very little has been revealed. The feeling of being too tired to climb up a hill at the same pace as someone is exhausting; the physical fatigue can be frustrating, and it can feel unfair to both parties if they aren't going the same speed. I wanted to introduce their relationship this way; their attempt to bond through a hike demonstrates their interest and care for each other, however the frustration in their incompatibility highlights the conflict between the characters.

Scene 2

2.1	0:51 The phone buzzes as we pan over to Jane asleep. She turns over in bed to grab the phone.	I wanted to spend a long time with establishing this second setting, because this is an abrupt change from the previous scene. The buzz of the phone wakes her from the previous scene, suggesting that it might have been a dream rather than the narrative present or reality.
2.2	1:04 She picks up the phone and blinks at the light, reacting to the phone indifferently at first, then pleasantly.	I wanted to give Jane time to process the information, but to also bring the audience close enough to her for long enough for them to realize it is the same person. Her first doubtful reaction is the same as the one we left her with in Scene 1.6, so it suggests that the two reactions could be tied to the same cause. This scene was cut from originally being a few seconds longer.
2.3	1:08 Jane turns off the phone and goes back to sleep, seeming satisfied.	I felt that this first interaction with the phone should be short. At this point, there isn't much that has happened in Section 1, and so the most important use of the second scene would be to introduce the alternate setting and situation.

Originally, I had hoped to put text messages in the film, showing Mark’s texts to Jane. Ultimately, I decided that these texts would distract the audience from Jane’s reactions, preventing them from building empathy. Additionally, I wanted to remove his agency from the film. Giving the audience access to Mark’s statements, albeit solely through texts and nonverbal communication, would potentially persuade them to question the integrity and validity of Jane’s frustration. By only showing Jane’s reactions to the texts, we retain empathy and trust in Jane the entire time, and can focus on her reactions as the most important part of our understanding of their relationship. We focus on the effect of Mark’s actions, rather than the intent. Whether or not he means to be harmful, I wanted the audience to build empathy and trust in Jane and in her instinct to have negative or positive feelings towards Mark.

Scene 3

3.1	1:17 At the top of a clearing, Jane appears alone and tired.	I think a clearing is a very positive environment. The symbolism of being physically out of the woods can feel safe and relieving. Yet, when we see Jane at the top without Mark, we immediately realize that the conflict of Scene 1 hasn’t been resolved.
3.2	1:25 Close up on Jane, as she opens her eyes and stands up, we see that she is frustrated or confused as she turns around.	Again, bringing the audience closer to her in order to build empathy, I felt that it was important that the audience be able to follow her reaction and movements, rather than to be able to see for themselves that Mark wasn’t at the top of the hill. Additionally, presenting her alone at the top not only would immediately remove her agency in the scene, but would make her look helpless. My intention was to preserve her willpower and strength in the situation by placing her above the audience, rather than to make her appear defeated.
3.3	1:33 Establishing shots	These both provide reference for the audience—the weather is turning, and we are indeed still in the same place. It implies that we have been in this same area for a long time, and that the current situation is preventing us from leaving. It forces the audience to consider the decision Jane will make regarding the

		conflict. We give her space to make her own choices without hovering over her every move, but we are also allowed to consider the possibilities of what might have happened during the last few scenes and make up our own mind about what she should do next.
3.4	1:39 Jane is seen on top of the hill, calling out.	The composition of the frame is resolute—Her stance on top of the mountain show that she is very sure about her choice to wait and call out for Mark. The distance and empty space around her also emphasize her aloneness. There is really no space in the scene that Mark could appear where she would have not seen him already. Her efforts are more or less futile.
3.5	1:43 As lightning flashes, we transition to a close up on Jane. It begins raining, and she decides to get down.	Lightning symbolizes danger, surprise, and most importantly, admonition. It warns her both that her attempts are futile, but also urges her to leave her post, as staying on top of the mountain is dangerous. The combination of this aggressive warning (lightning) the soft pessimism of the rain both foreshadow her relationship with Mark for the rest of the film, and introduce to us the beginning of her internal conflict—in what ways should she continue to support or show concern for her friend who puts you in unsafe or unkind situations? Her decision to return home is not an easy one, as her hesitation indicates to the audience her difficulty differentiating between what is moral, what is safe, and what is fair.
3.5	1:52 Establishing shots	These help us move from one setting to another, while also allowing Jane an arbitrary amount of time to travel down and home.
3.7	* Jane crosses the street, avoiding cars in the rain	This felt excessive, and there was no reason to put Jane in more danger than the lighting. The risk of it seemed overkill.
3.8	2:00 Jane is seen at the top of a staircase with the trees in the background, then she enters a building.	I liked the idea of putting the audience at the top of the stairs, so instead of following Jane, we are one step ahead of her. This emphasizes her tendency to fall behind, but also positions her as our guide through our relationship to the narrative, as she walks straight to a random door and enters without hesitation.
3.9	2:04 Interior of the building, Jane slides in and takes off her hood, relieved to be out of the rain.	Similar to the last scene, I like the idea of the audience behind a step ahead of Jane because it makes the audience feel like they are on the same page as her.

3.10	* Jane, stunned, looks over to see Mark and some friends inside talking and laughing.	This scene felt too spiteful, and made Jane feel too pathetic. I think the strangeness of not knowing where Mark is guides the audience to question his intentions and whereabouts in the same way that Jane does.
3.11	* Jane remains in the doorway, upset and confused, and decides against confrontation.	This scene doesn't make sense without 3.10.

Scene 3 was challenging for me in that my first instinct was to reveal a lot of information. To show that Mark had left her behind, but to not explain why felt unfair to his character. To show her dodging cars in the rain in the pursuit of a character we don't know very much about felt pathetic. I think most of my edits were made with the intention of leveling the playing field for the characters. The audience already feels empathetic to Jane, so there is no reason to make Mark more definitively evil or mean. To not be able to make a judgement about their relationship also allows the audience to question Jane; why is she following this other character around? Why is she so upset that he left her when he was already being impatient? I like that this scene both makes us pity her character, but also asks us to question her choices.

I worried about introducing the building—is it Mark's house? Or is it revealed later to be the studio?—because the purpose and use of the structure itself is unclear. I think this establishes the building as neutral ground for the rest of the scenes. It's unclear why Jane retreats here and whether or not she expects Mark to be there as well. I think the ambiguity of the space reminds the audience that while we may be able

analyze their relationship, there is too much we don't know about them and too little context for us to be able to make a firm decision about their relationship.

Scene 4

4.1	2:13 Phone buzz cuts us back to Jane asleep again. She looks annoyed at her phone buzzing, but reluctantly picks it up and looks at it. Cut to black.	As Jane turns to her right in the previous scene, perhaps still looking for Mark, her body position in this scene shows a strong opposition to that direction, where her phone sits. This change in posture between the scenes illustrates her frustration with the situation, and her tensing at the sound of the phone buzzing shows us that the phone and the scenes in Section 1 are tied.
4.2	* Jane is engrossed in the messages, in the foreground, a photo on the bedside table of Jane and Mark	This scene felt to cliché and like I was forcing nostalgia. I wanted the audience to make their own assumptions about the relationship between Jane and Mark in Section 1.
4.3	2:25 She is engaged in the screen, laying on her side. She puts the phone down next to her and goes to sleep.	Because this scene cuts in from black and Jane is shown to have a different posture as the previous scene, it is possible that she has spent a lot of time going through the messages. Because she puts the phone down next to her, it appears that she anticipates another text, though the frustration and dread on her face shows, only to be calmed by returning to sleep.

Scene 4, unlike Scene 2, helps illuminate some of the ties between Section 1 and Section 2. Her occupation with the phone mirrors her persistence in trying to find Mark on the hill. In the previous scene, the first conflict comes to a close (Jane goes home), and so we are left to wonder what happens in the next Section 1 scene. Thus, allowing Jane some time to reflect and perhaps display some unclear attitudes towards the phone leaves the audience waiting for information about Mark's character that is positive that might help explain Jane's interest in their relationship.

Scene 5

5.1	2:36 Cut to a blank wall, where two hands enter and tape up a piece of paper.	I wanted to slowly introduce this scene by making the situation minimal. Taping up a piece of paper to a blank wall, without a character or a motive suggests that we are in a completely new situation, environment, and possible atmosphere.
5.2	2:39 We zoom out to see Mark inside a room, taping papers to the wall. Outside the room, Jane enters the frame, stops, and leans against the door watching Mark.	Once again, our back is to Mark's character, thus making us feel distanced from his activities just as we thought we might be able to understand more about him by seeing the paper and his face close up. Getting a moment alone with Mark allows the audience to make judgements about him—is he gentle and thoughtful? Does he want to be alone? Where is he? By bringing Jane into the picture, she suddenly has more power than him, as she lingers over him and confidently pauses over his work.
5.3	2:48 Mark is in the foreground, looking frustrated at the paper. Jane casually leans against the frame, and as Mark reaches for another piece of paper, she catches his attention and walks towards him, trying to cheer him up.	Immediately, the power dynamic on the screen is shifted again. Mark towers above Jane, though her posture still seems self-assured. At this moment, he isn't ignoring her, but simply doesn't notice that she is there. This stands in contrast to Scenes 1 and 3, where he is clearly and intentionally ignoring her. This information about Mark contradicts the assumptions we have made about him, and his positive reaction to her entering the room confuses the audience further. If she annoys him, why does he seem reassured by her presence?
5.4	2:55 Jane crosses the room as Mark picks up another paper. She hesitates, but then joins him to look at his piece and puts her hand softly on his shoulder before awkwardly removing it.	As she crosses the room towards him, he immediately makes a space for her to stand, and prompts her to join him by turning back towards the paper. Her hesitation is shared by the audience—though her stride and her hand on his back give the audience confidence that she is feeling positive about their relationship.

5.4	3:01 From above, she and Mark look at the paper.	As the audience is unable to see their faces or their body posture, these few seconds prompt us to consider whether or not this is a positive or negative interaction.
5.5	3:03 Jane looks at Mark, who still seems frustrated and displeased with his work. She jokes with him to lighten his mood, which temporarily makes him feel better, but he soon returns his attention to the work and puts up the second piece of paper.	Because Jane tries to cheer up Mark and he is unable relax about the situation, we assume that he is ignoring her or doesn't like her. However, because we aren't sure of what she said, the audience is unable to decide who is being insensitive in the situation. At this point, we understand that Mark and Jane have a positive relationship, but that perhaps they both aren't strong communicators or have both struggled to be the right kind of friend to each other.

This scene is very complicated to navigate. It introduces a new environment and also a new moment in their relationship and a new character trait for Mark. In some ways, it turns the narrative that we have been establishing on its head. All of the sudden, Mark—the unreliable character—is presented to be troubled, rather than simply rude. It suggests that perhaps the problems in the relationship between the characters aren't completely his fault, but rather their inability to communicate their emotional needs and the level of support they require becomes more pertinent to the narrative.

Scene 6

6.1	3:09 Immediately cut to Jane in bed, reaching without hesitation for her phone. She turns over to look across the room.	This cut didn't leave any time between the last scene because I didn't want the audience to have much time to sort through the reactions of the characters. Because Jane's bed is skewed, rather than straight on as per usual, the audience feels strangely out of sorts.
6.2	3:16 Over her shoulder, we see an alarm clock indicating	In some ways, Jane looking across the room also expands the boundaries of the setting in Section 2. We are finally given a time to reference, and

	that it's 3:33 a.m., and Jane reluctantly turns back to her phone, yawning.	realize that Jane is up in the middle of the night texting. These last two scenes move quickly, introducing a lot of information without giving the audience the same luxury of time to reflect and process the events.
6.3	* Jane is looking at her phone, and slides back into sleep with her phone still in her hand.	This made the scene too long, and the fact that she goes back to sleep is implied. I wanted these scenes to move faster, and this sub-scene felt repetitive and unhelpful.

Out of all the scenes so far, this one is the most abrupt. It follows one of the most information-heavy scenes, and by giving the audience so little time to process the new information about the characters and the settings, the entire narrative begins to seem overwhelming and unclear.

Scene 7

7.1	3:29 Establishing shot, the same setting as Scenes 1 and 3.	Because the establishing shot is familiar, there is comfort for the audience in revisiting a color palette and image that they are familiar with, given that the previous two scenes revealed so much information. This gives the audience time to regroup and process the last two scenes, yet also proposes that revisiting the earlier scenes might be helpful in reconciling all of the mixed feelings about Mark and Jane's relationship.
7.2	3:34 The side of the rocky hill, Jane comes into view climbing up, with the same outfit as scenes 1 and 3. She slips, but continues up the hill.	To see Jane in the middle of her struggle of climbing up the hill emphasizes her desperation to put effort into their friendship. Whereas in Scene 3 the audience is given time to wonder what Jane will do after she realizes Mark isn't there, this scene clarifies her choice, both giving her agency by illustrating her effort, while also taking away her power because the audience is aware of the outcome of her search.
7.3	3:46	The futility of the situation begins to sink in for Jane, and the audience moves from empathy to

	Jane appears at the top of the hill, the same shot as 3.5. She look up from the top.	pity, knowing that her attempts to find him will be futile.
7.4	3:51 The same shot as 3.4, Jane begins looking for Mark.	As the voicemail verbalizes her inability to confront Mark about his unreliability, we consider perhaps the voicemail-Jane isn't as strong as we had hoped, and that she is still as optimistic about their friendship as she was at the beginning of the film.

The choice to revisit this scene wasn't a clear one; I wanted to reintroduce this scene later because I thought it illustrated their relationship accurately. When we are first introduced to the characters here, we have very little knowledge of them or the way their relationship functions. Although this scene doesn't resolve any of the issues between the characters, I think it helps the audience realign themselves with Jane. It is easy to distrust a narrator, especially one which gets upset and selectively recalls memories. We desperately want to be objective viewers. However, if we are interested in Jane, it doesn't necessarily matter if she is feeling pessimistic about Mark. By reintroducing this scene, we are brought back to the innocence of the character and the sympathy we felt for her at the beginning; we are asked to recall all of the information we have gathered, and make a decision for ourselves about her intentions and objectivity in their relationship.

Scene 8

8.1	4:00 A suitcase is brought placed on a platform, it is late afternoon.	At the beginning of Section 3, we are incrementally introduced to a new setting. The suitcase, the purple hues, and the stride are all associated with Jane. After she walks past, there are a few seconds for us to reflect on where she
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		might be, and when in the sequence of narratives this occurs.
8.2	4:10 Jane walks from below and overhang, pulling a suitcase. She looks around for a minute, then checks her phone.	Jane strides confidently toward us just as she does in Scene 5.3, and yet the moment she begins to look around, we realize that she is expecting Mark, just as she has previously, and we expect the worst.
8.3	4:19 Outside the building, Jane sits on her suitcase next to a taxi while a woman and a child exit the frame, walking away from the station.	It is implied that a significant amount of time passes, and Jane’s weariness begins to rub off on the audience. Once again, like in the previous scene, we pity her. The audience is given more time to try to understand where and when this scene takes place.
8.4	4:23 Jane drums her fingers and sits up on the suitcase, tired of waiting.	This moment of resolve marks the narrative present—we recall her decision to get a taxi, her building frustration and fatigue in the voicemail, and the audience is finally brought up to speed with Jane’s choices. We are given all of the information, and by both visualizing and verbalizing this decision, it seems that though we may not agree with her, we can understand Jane’s perspective on the situation, and we can support her decision to accept defeat and call a taxi.
8.5	4:34 There is a taxi in front of the building from Scene 3, and as it drives away, Jane rolls her luggage up the stairs to the door. As she knocks, the scene cuts to black.	This moment almost comes as a relief to the audience. On one hand, we are interested in knowing why Mark didn’t pick Jane up from the station. On the other hand, Jane’s decision to resolve the problem and go home feels more resolute—the last time we were in this same setting, Jane was in a similar situation. However, waiting for Mark in Scenes 1 and 3 seemed hopeless, whereas her decision to take a taxi home instead of waiting for him felt like she recalled some of her agency. The lack of ambient noise in the scene signifies its importance and allows the audience to find closure and resolution with Jane.

Scene 8 had been originally been interspersed with other scenes, combining Sections 1, 2 and 3 to create the perfect storm of scenes illustrating the negative points of Mark and Jane’s relationship. However, in order to establish a narrative present, it was important to not leave Jane’s general vicinity or to follow any other timelines. Because she regains her composure in the second voicemail, I found it important to not obscure her decision to leave a kinder voicemail by interjecting it with scenes that portrayed her as indifferent. In calling a taxi instead of waiting for Mark to pick her up, Jane assumes agency in their relationship. There was no clean way to end this conflict, and I found the best way was to allow Jane to make an informed choice. The entire film follows her decision-making to be the direct responses to old memories and nostalgia, however Scene 8 and the narrative present are the first moment in the film where she is given the opportunity to make a decision based on the sum of her relationship with Mark.

Scene 9

9.1	4:47 Establishing shot, the canopy of the woods	Because usually between scenes the location changes, I wanted to use a familiar establishing shot with different colors to suggest a different time in the same place.
9.2	4:54 Establishing shot outside of the room with the drawings	The empty drawing room also implies a different time and place.
9.3	5:01 Establishing shot of the transit station	The train station is still relatively unfamiliar, but because we have only briefly encountered it, including it in the establishing shot suggests that the two previous subscenes were only to establish general place, not necessarily a specific setting. Bringing the narrative back to the station after we had just left indicates the end of the trip that Jane has arrived for.

9.4	5:05 The side of a car, the door swings open and Jane steps out to put her bag over her shoulder. She stands at the side of the car while a figure enters in the foreground.	In getting out of the car, we assume that Jane is either in a taxi or with Mark. While her stance is reminiscent of her annoyed waiting, her smile indicates that she feels positively towards the figure she is waiting on.
9.5	5:13 Mark comes around to meet her with her luggage bag, and awkwardly passes it off to her. They stand together for a moment, smiling.	To reveal Mark at the end helping Jane with her luggage perhaps brings up new questions to the audience. He looks happy to have helped her and spent time with her, and they look like they both feel sad to say goodbye. Though confusing for the audience, there is some relief in knowing that somewhere between the last scene and the current scene, Mark and Jane resolved the problem.
9.6	5:24 Jane puts her belongings in a bin in a TSA line.	This shot both helps establish that Jane is leaving, but also is indicative of the amount of effort she went through to visit. To know that she travelled a long way to visit Mark seems to put more gravity in their friendship.
9.7	5:28 Jane sits in an airport terminal.	Because Jane's character does so much waiting in the film, this scene almost feels comfortable. She isn't waiting on a person, but instead can rest and wait for something scheduled. This waiting is vastly different from what we are used to seeing from her, and indicates that there has been a change in her attitude due to her indifference.
9.8	5:34 Jane sits in the airplane alone, looking out the window. The seat next to her is empty, and she checks her phone, only to be asked to put it away by a flight attendant. She puts it down.	This scene is strange because it suggests closure. Because she is leaving Mark and the location from Section 1, she is symbolically distancing herself from that relationship and those memories. However because she is about to go somewhere else, we are unable to predict where she is emotionally. Her response to her phone is difficult to read—It is the first time she has looked at her phone affectionately, and thus we question whether or not this section is truly the narrative present, or whether or not it

		exists between Section 1 and Section 2 in the greater sequence of events.
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I love this ending scene, because there is no resolution. There is nothing that explains the status of Mark and Jane’s relationship, or if they ever resolved their problems or just chose to avoid them. Their strange formality and politeness seems out of character for them both. By the end of the film, the sequence of events is relatively unclear, and thus we must revisit our assumptions about the cause and effect of their relationship, both within the individual scenes and throughout the film in its entirety.

Voicemails

I worked for a long time with my copywriter, Mac Mullen, on writing the voicemails for the film. Originally, Mark and Jane alternated voicemails in Section 1, imitating the frustration of playing phone tag and constantly missing calls and connections. However, giving Mark the agency of a voice, like the text messages, seemed counterproductive in attempting to establish narrative empathy for Jane’s character towards the beginning of the film. I considered giving Mark a voicemail at the very end that would take the form of an apology, but it seemed too much like an excuse for his character, and that it would cause the audience to feel frustrated at Jane for not being more patient with him.

In some ways, the voicemails felt like a reflection of my own frustrations with Mark and the piece itself. My first set of recorded voicemails were similar to the ones I ended up using—Jane grew increasingly frustrated until she finally told Mark that she refused to make excuses for him any longer, and that he wasn’t a dependable friend.

Initially I felt guilty for painting Mark as such a terrible character, and for allowing Jane to call him out on his unreliability. My impulse was to scale back on the use of nostalgia as a weapon against him, and thus I tried to erase so much of my innate emotional response to my relationship with Mark in real life because of the guilt I felt for framing him as a bad person in the film. However, it felt self-sacrificing to invalidate my frustration with Mark completely. I knew that I had to accept my frustration with him as valid and worthy of space in the film, but also acknowledge that I wasn't giving power or agency to Jane by ending the film with her decidedly removing him from her life. That was not the resolution that I had come to with my friendship with Mark in my own life, and by creating an alternate solution for Jane, I was illustrating my own relationship with Mark as weak and wrong. I decided that whether or not Jane was allowing herself to be disrespected by Mark, or if her departure was prompted by a decision to remove her from their friendship, it didn't matter. She ultimately made the decision to forgive him and to resolve her relationship the way she saw fit. I'm not even completely sure of what happened between Scene 8 and Scene 9, or why she decided to let Mark off the hook for not picking her up. At the end of the film, all the decisions are Jane's, and the audience has so little information that they are forced to respect her agency whether or not they agree with her actions and decisions.

Reflection

My hope with this film was that I would have a neatly finished product by the end of this process. I wanted to have answers for all of my choices, and to understand my own personal narrative more clearly. I was hoping that perhaps the process of writing and making the film would act as therapy to help me sort out my feelings

towards my friendship with Mark, although every time I wrote a new scene or went back to critique it and improve or clarify it, I seemed to come back with more questions about the story and my own objectivity. I learned more about myself than I had planned, and the film ultimately became a way for me to visualize my process of compartmentalizing emotional labor. I pulled from different experiences and friendships; I looked to other frustrating moments in my life, like trying to text a different overseas friend in the middle of the night time, feeling exhausted and alone after long days of travel, and losing patience with a friend and feeling self-deprecating, to help me process my tendency to overthink and overreact to things.

Though I had hoped for a clear resolution, I think being able to organize some of my most vulnerable, frustrating, and depressing thoughts and feelings into a film is therapeutic in its own way. There is a pleasure in irresolution; there is comfort that lies in being able to accept that although I can't have every answer for how I should feel, I can organize and express those feelings into something tangible, embracing the poetic logic of thought and reflection. After making this film, I feel more empathetic towards Mark and our relationship, having been able to explore the factors which may have contributed to our distance and accept them, relieving either of us from blame. I believe that this film, as an extremely literal personal narrative, has challenged me to think about my filmmaking and narrative-writing more experimentally and deeply. Being unsure about a narrative only translates to reflection; though I believe some of my films have been more successful than others, I have never felt complete resolve. I was never able to use a story to solve a personal problem, or to be confident that I saw it through in the best possible manner. This film is different because it embraces that irresolution

and celebrates the unknown. In comparison to my other work, I think finding pleasure in this irresolution is what makes this film more unique, more emotional, and more sincere than any other animation I have made before.

The countless critiques and revisions that had been made to the film throughout its creation has made me a better writer and editor, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to make something so personal and to have had the support to make it something I felt was worth sharing.

Concluding Remarks

At first the prospect of applying research to something so personal and focused on artistic process seemed daunting, and the idea of critiquing my own work and trying to view my practice within the genre felt like facing a fear; The process of close inspection and critique suggested that my work could become less valuable through close inspection and reflection. In hindsight, this fear seems comical to me. My hesitation doesn't arise from my want for self-critique and improvement, but rather from my inability to look objectively at my work and acknowledge my influences, and to see my work as a product of these influences. I would love to think that in some ways, I exist in a vacuum. However, I know that my choice to work within animation—a medium that I have mindlessly consumed for most of my life—meant that I would have to address the conventions which I adhere to or choose to break, and acknowledge the discrimination which has existed within the animation industry and has barred other women from being able to create work in order to progress the medium further.

In creating *Mark*, it seems that most every instance of hesitation, regret, or guilt in my creative choices came from my fear of telling a personal narratively subjectively. The thought of negatively framing a situation which may have been the result of a misunderstanding weighed heavily on me as an artist—the thought of illustrating a story and a character in a certain light to convince the audience of blame seemed like too much responsibility and I found myself constantly wanting to subdue my emotional responses to events so as to not accidentally construct myself as a victim of emotional abuse, whether or not I actually was one. As a woman, I have been taught to choose my words wisely and to treat my emotional response as invalid—I often felt that Jane was

too aggressive, too vocal about her frustration, and too dramatic. Throughout the entire creation of the film, I constantly was caught in a battle between my own impetus for communicating emotional personal narrative and my fear of creating a film which was too opinionated, subjective, and one-sided. Because the medium which I loved so dearly for its storytelling capabilities was so rigidly defined by conventions which defined my own response and narratives as unsound, I was required to constantly question and abandon my understanding of the purpose of animation, leading me to my research of the brave and revolutionary work of women animators producing from the margins of the medium.

To celebrate the female animators who continuously revolutionize the medium is to push the industry forward; the stories that women tell not only subvert narratives which have traditionally defined and restricted the medium, but act as visual testimonies to the experiences of women which have historically been discounted, mistreated, and erased. I have learned so much about my own identity as a cis woman, the way I understand and tell my own stories, as well as my own animation practice. I admire the work of other women animators who have struggled to gain recognition, and whose films are not only radical in form and style, but in purpose and narrative.

It is rare that any cultural capital with the potential to influence sociocultural conventions isn't exploited to support patriarchal perspectives, and thus the discrimination perpetuated within this capital is difficult to frame objectively within the conversation of style and convention. I believe that animation, through its accessibility, variability in form and purpose, and its capacity to be reinvented through new technology, allows artists and academics an abundance of opportunities to critique the

media and animated films; The method is simple and the possibility for narrative exploration is endless; the only barrier to the conversation are the conventions of the center. This project marks the end of a long journey of discovery, investigation, and creation within my thesis project. But, more importantly, it stands as a framework from which I can continue to create my own work and investigate my own practice, and through which I can look critically at the work and stories of the female animators innovate and inspire. It seems that there will always be opportunities to change, grow, and evolve within the medium, and it's clear that—in opposition to the male center—a woman's work is never done.

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