

Hello and thank you all for coming to my thesis presentation. My name is Nicolás, I've been making art for as long as I can remember, but I landed on animation as a primary medium for my practice 3 years ago. I had been interested in painting, drawing, designing, and making music, but animation combined all these disciplines to create something bigger than the sum of its parts.

The fact that animation offers control over each frame in a video sequence and has the option of using sound made it feel like a logical next step towards expanding the type of experiences I can create as an artist. However, I grew tired of all the narrative work that most people think of when they hear the word "animation".

This type of work feels a little bit too sure of itself for my own taste, it tends to be pretty upfront with what it's about and how you should feel about the issues it deals with. In the contemporary context of a global pandemic, racial reckoning, and a dystopic late capitalist society, making work that claims to have all the answers feels, to me at least, silly and disingenuous.

On the other hand, this same cultural context kept bringing up questions that I felt I had to attempt to address in my work. How did we get to this point? When and how does subjectivity allow for all the selfishness and injustice we see in the world? What would a world that represents such ideas look like? All of these questions are seemingly impossible to answer, but through art they can be explored and discussed in countless ways.

It starts with nothing, and then everything, only to end up back as nothing again. This was the gist of the structure I based the piece on: a metaphor for the experience of life and the creation of the world. A big bang of sorts brings color and shape to our senses, and a textured blob morphs and dances on the screen.

Each frame in the sequence of textures is a heavily edited photo from my phone, documenting with a purposefully ambiguous aesthetic my life after moving to this city. Distorted beyond recognition, these images flash before the spectator similarly to how life moves on and memories become but a frame in the movie of our lives.

Inspired by Robert Breer's early experiments on the limits of perception in the context of frame by frame animation, this scene turns fairly recent memories into an unintelligible morphing texture that serves as a metaphor commenting on how these fleeting moments shape our identities.

Then, different perspectives of the same hand drawn animated loop come up as a metaphor for the subjective reality that has been conceived by the viewer. The image of a black and white checkered pattern symbolizes the order we find within our own worldview, and this pattern morphs into the floor of a new dimension we are brought into.

The dark hallways we are taken to are sterile but carry with them a sense of wonder and nostalgia. This parallels my real life experiences of struggling to learn cinema 4d as I worked on

this scene, and struggling to get used to life in a different culture. The darkness and janky movement from the hall give a sense of uncertainty, but some of the things we run into while navigating these halls evoke feelings of curiosity, wonder, and familiarity.

This scene came to me as a desire to recreate a childhood visual that started my relationship with 3d graphics: the windows 97 labyrinth screensaver. I wanted to recreate the feeling of seeing a type of imagery one doesn't fully understand yet, but is intrigued by the certainty with which it presents us with a new reality. I also wanted to play with the labyrinth as a metaphor for life and the many paths one can take through it.

Eventually, we run into a dead end in these halls, but break through the walls, only to find another version of the same place. This section of the short was inspired by my first time visiting my home country after moving here for art school. It features rotoscoped footage from video I took at my parent's house, where I spent most of my childhood and my early days as a young adult.

These halls are much lighter, as to suggest a sense of clarity and calmness, but this contrasts with the hectic and abstract rotoscoped clips. Each clip is a distortion of the reality I lived while visiting home, and the original footage comes through each stroke of the animation, except it's desaturated and noisy. These moments go by as quick events that decorate the space we move through and bring another realm of abstracted realness to the sterile halls of the labyrinth.

After spending a while in this place, the halls become blurry and paths begin to overlap one another. The illusion of reality is broken and distorted, and the screen begins to shrink as the blurry halls turn into a small square that gets eaten up by the darkness surrounding it.

This scene is an entry into the final act of the short: chaos. The moment where all of the darkness and uneasiness hidden throughout the rest of the film comes out. A colorful blob dances slowly around the dark, empty space, as it welcomes us to a new realm. Then the shadow of this same blob comes back multiplied and flickering, hinting to a drastic change in pacing. Finally, a hand drawn animated loop takes over the screen, and a chaotic scene of abstract shapes hecticly moved around the screen.

The animation in this sequence is an abstract representation of overwhelming, stressful, and scary thoughts that are behind any interpretation of reality. As this loop plays in front of the screen, a textured spiral blob pulses forward into the viewer's eyes. The texture inside this spiral is made out of heavily processed footage taken from previous parts of the short and from some of the video I used for rotoscoping earlier in the film.

This grotesque distortion presents us with a visual assault of sorts that aims to capture the energy of the darker aspects of reality. But just as spontaneously as it appears, it's soon gone and pure darkness comes back to us again. From this darkness, the short begins once again.

A poem without words, a song that goes from ambient to noise in a chaotic loop, a dream you never had but somehow get a glimpse into. These are all ways in which I've thought about describing my goals with this piece, but the truth is that words only scratch the surface of the raw emotions I'm trying to point at. Using ambiguity as a strategy, I want the piece to be completed by the viewer's perception of it.

Taking inspiration from Chilean artist Roberto Matta, this piece aims to use abstraction as a technique to engage with the viewers and push them to see beyond what their eyes are showing them. It's an imagining of subjectivity that becomes a new subjective experience of it's own once the viewers engage with it.

Matta often approached abstract painting with this concept he used to call "inscapes". A combination of the words internal and landscape, these paintings showed emotional truths in a way that words can not convey. This approach is something I had coincidentally used previously without knowing Matta's involvement with it. I think it's also relevant to my thesis project, and it's a useful way to describe the type of experience I'm trying to create with this piece.

Another artist I looked for inspiration for this piece is the Venezuelan painter and sculptor Jesús Rafael Soto. With a focus on how subjective perception can affect a viewer's experience when looking at a piece of art, Soto made works that aimed to blur and push the boundaries of painting and installation. Similarly, I want to push the limits of what can be done with animation by including elements of installation that take the viewer's subjective perspective into account.

However, the installation aspect of my piece is very much a work in progress still. I knew I wanted to experiment with multiple projections happening at different times, and see how the viewer's movement around these projected spaces affects their experience of the piece. That said, I think there's still a lot of potential to be uncovered using installation as a medium. In the future I would like to experiment with different surfaces to project onto, or different ways to limit or expand what the viewer can see in each one of the projections.

My role in creating this piece has been split into several different realms. Primarily, I was an animator, but even this general role implies a bunch of micro-roles that most animators have to assume while working on their own projects. I was an illustrator, a designer, a collector of indexical images, a musician, a student, and an explorer of visual languages and emotions that shape my subjectivity.

I started off with the general energy I wanted to convey throughout each scene of the piece. From here, I worked on the music. Once I had a rough draft of the sound, I began sketching out ideas to visualize the sound I made and the emotions I wanted to create.

This approach to visual aesthetics is radically different from the conventional production process we see in animation. I didn't make a storyboard, and all of the images I had to describe how each scene would look lived in my mind. There, these ideas existed as an amorphous blob that I tried to bring into this reality. While they felt impossible to capture as they existed in my mind,

through intuition and emotional introspection I managed to capture a version of them that could live in my animated short.

A lot of the editing process relied on intuition. After all, I knew the type of feelings and imagery I wanted to create, I just had to find a way to get there with the tools I had at my disposal. While traditional animation methods were used for a couple of sequences included in the film, most of it was done in a computer, using softwares that I had drastically different levels of familiarity with.

The use of the computer as a tool for creative practice played several roles throughout my process. It was limiting in some ways, because I worked with new software I wasn't very proficient in, but in other ways it offered endless possibilities. Knowing my way around photoshop like the palm of my hand made it so that I had a clear idea of how to go about creating the type of imagery I wanted, but on the other hand, being new to cinema 4d meant that any attempt to work with it was an experiment.

These different levels of familiarity with the tools I used led me to take different paths and in many ways ended up shaping the aesthetics of my piece. The sound was made in ableton, a music production software I'm fairly familiar with, but the chaotic ending of the sound came out of a software that isn't even used for making music at all. The glitchy, noisy ending was a product of the audio file getting corrupted while I tried to play it and preview my animation in after effects. I recorded this glitch and added it to my ableton file, to create an even more chaotic ending that is directly a product of the different softwares I used in conversation with one another.

As an artist making non-narrative moving image work, it can be hard to find an audience of people that relate to and appreciate this type of work. I tried getting a cold read from my midterm review panelists, but most of them didn't really "get" what I was going for. I want to make challenging work that pushes people to reconsider their expectations from animation, and encourages them to dive deep into the ambiguity presented as a strategy to bring out their own internal truths.

Most people are put off by work that doesn't immediately resonate with them in a level they can easily digest. Providing some context can help ease the viewers into the experience and point them to ways of thinking about the piece. However, in such a personal piece it can be hard to navigate the fine line between giving out enough information and not feeling like I'm putting myself in an uncomfortably vulnerable position by going into too much detail about what my process was.

I consider this piece to be successful just because I'm happy with how it came out, it feels true to the original vision I had when I thought about it for the first time. If it sparks curiosity, calmness, stress, or any sort of reaction or mix of reactions other than boredom from the viewer then that's great. However, I'm not concerned with measuring the success of the piece in those terms. The piece is what it is, but it's also what people make of it.

Finally, I wanted to talk about what I look forward to in the future in terms of my career and creative practice. I would like to keep learning new softwares and exploring different ways of making art. Virtual reality and video game design are two mediums that I would love to incorporate into my practice. I want to keep experimenting with animation and the ways in which it can create and manipulate emotions, and keep testing out ways in which installation can add even more meaning to it. I would also like to get some more experience working in the animation industry, in order to make connections with people that might give me the opportunity to work on projects I'm passionate about. Last but definitely not least, I want to have fun and make art that I find both enjoyable to make and rewarding to finish, regardless of how silly the concepts might be.