

All-Nighter

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Artist Statement

“**All-Nighter**” is a surrealist psychological short film that combines live action and animation to explore the narrative of physical and mental sacrifice as an indicator of the value of one’s work. The film employs surrealist imagery to visualize the physical and mental impacts of this societal mindset, specifically regarding sleep deprivation. The visual distortions, illusions, and hallucinations depicted in the piece are grounded in personal and scientific accounts of experiences with sleep deprivation. The film gradually develops from live-action to animation, reflecting the furthering disconnect from reality when in a sleep-deprived state.

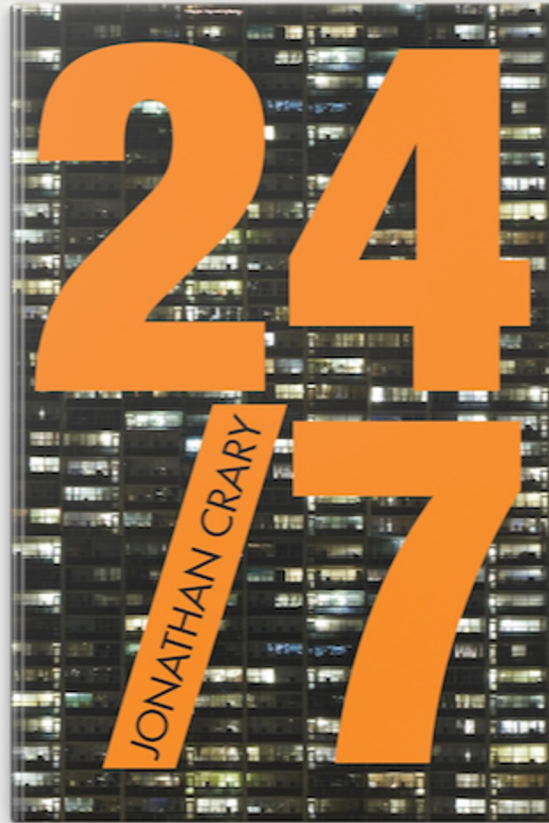
Research

Within my artistic practice, I have always been drawn toward exploring the topic of sleep. Throughout my high school years, sleep had always been elusive to me, pushed away from my grasp by piles of work. It was always ingrained in me that sleep came second to my academics, regardless of the toll it took on my physical and mental health. In recent years I have learned to reprioritize these values, though I am still intrigued and appalled at how this behavior was encouraged by the communities I was a part of. Through my research, I sought to discover why our society so widely prioritizes work over sleep, and how I can visualize the effects of this attitude through my short film.

Reading the chapter “Trade Stories and Career Capital” from John Caldwell’s *Production Culture* truly set this research into motion. In this chapter, Caldwell discusses the stories workers in different sectors of the film industry tell about their jobs, the “trade genres” these stories fall under, and the “cultural functions” these stories serve (Caldwell 2008, 38). While reading this chapter I was fascinated by the concept of “war stories,” a trade genre that emphasizes experiences of struggle and undergoing pain for the sake of one’s work as a way of “establishing craft mastery” through “moral character and triumph of will” (Caldwell 2008, 38-39). Though this chapter discusses this concept solely within the context of the film industry, my personal discussions with students and workers in a variety of fields show that this genre of trade narrative does not solely belong to the film industry. From business to medicine, most individuals I have spoken to have experienced pressure to sacrifice their mental or physical health—such as through sleep deprivation—in order to prove themselves as a valuable worker.

9 genres of Trade Stories

TRADE GENRES	CONTEXT / WORK SECTORS	CULTURAL FUNCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War stories • Against-all-odds allegories 	Below-the-line technical crafts (operators, editors, grips, etc.)	Establishing craft mastery; labor mystique; mentoring system (via moral character and triumph of will) <i>Skill set: certitude, physique, and belief</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis myths • Paths-not-taken parables 	Above-the-line creative sector (DPs, directors, writers, producers)	Professional legitimacy and accumulation of career capital (via pedigree and industrial ancestry) <i>Skill set: intuition, vision, name dropping</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making-it sagas • Cautionary tales 	Unregulated and nonsignatory sectors (assistants, agents, reps, clerical)	Career salvage operations; boundary and turf marking (via networking, hooking up and giving back) <i>Skill set: quid pro quo human relationships</i>



One of these such conversations took place during my guest critique session with artist Masimba Hwati. While we spoke, Masimba shared with me that he also had a personal connection to the subject of sleep deprivation, and provided me with an essay by Siobhan Phillips titled “**Sleep as Resistance.**” Phillips poetically ruminates on the strange and contradictory aspects of sleep, noting, “Without sleep, we would dissolve into overloaded confusion”—a line that particularly resonated with my personal experiences (Phillips 2014). Within the essay, Phillips refers to Jonathan Crary’s book **24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep**, which led me to look into this source myself. In the book, Crary traces back the roots of this devaluation of sleep, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century when prominent philosophers began to note sleep’s “incompatibility with modern notions of productivity and rationality” (Crary 2013, 12). In *Treatise on Human Nature*, for example, David Hume identifies sleep as one of several “obstacles to knowledge” (Crary 2013, 12). Crary observes that within our current state of late capitalism, in which all of our time has been overtaken by work or consumption, sleep is viewed as unnecessary for “economic growth and profitability” (Crary 2013, 14-15). It is now seen as “normal” for laborers to work “without pause, without limits,” which rings true to the personal experiences of myself and my network (Crary 2013, 9).

**“Severe Sleep Deprivation Causes
Hallucinations and a Gradual Progression
Toward Psychosis With Increasing Time Awake”**

Flavie Waters, Vivian Chiu, Amanda Atkinson,
and Jan Dirk Blom

Now backed by historical and theoretical context to this subject, I faced the question of how to visualize the effects of sleep deprivation in my project. Within my own experiences, a significantly alarming effect I endured involved visual hallucinations and distortions of reality. I sought out scientific research surrounding these types of occurrences. One particularly helpful article I found was “Severe Sleep Deprivation Causes Hallucinations and a Gradual Progression Toward Psychosis With Increasing Time Awake” by Flavie Waters, Vivian Chiu, Amanda Atkinson, and Jan Dirk Blom, which gathers research from 21 studies on sleep deprivation. The article notes the prominence of visual changes caused by sleep deprivation in these studies, and describes the different types of changes experienced: distortions, illusions, and hallucinations (Waters et al. 2018, 1-4). This article provided me with scientific accounts to reference in addition to my own experiences when depicting sleep deprivation-induced visual changes.

Precedents

Several artistic precedents in both film and animation inspired my methods of depicting these effects as well. I looked at Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* due to its strong connection to my subject, as it centers around a ballet dancer willing to sacrifice herself both mentally and physically for the sake of perfecting her craft. In the film, reality constantly shifts and warps, even within a single shot—as highlighted by the dressing room fight scene between Portman and Kunis' characters. This unreliable perspective prompts the viewer to question what aspects of the story presented are real and which are illusions, an effect I was to achieve in my own project (Aronofsky 2010).



Figure 1. Frame from "BLACK SWAN Featurette: Visual Effects Reel. Searchlight Pictures, Jan 28, 2011. [youtube.com/watch?v=4n71sjmd-bM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n71sjmd-bM).

Precedents



Figure 2. Frame from *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*. <https://www.awn.com/news/animated-soft-serve-meets-metaphysical-thriller-im-thinking-ending-things>.

Another film that notably inspired me was Charlie Kaufman's *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*. Though the film differs in subject matter, I found its mixture of live action and animated elements particularly influential. When the main character reaches the peak of his mental decline, he begins to hallucinate animated visuals in the window of his car (Kaufman 2020). In my own project, I made use of this technique of transitioning from live-action to animation as a way of visually conveying the mental deterioration of a character.

Precedents



Figure 3. *Frame from "Ghost Dogs."* <https://vimeo.com/710964142>.

In terms of the style of animation I plan on using, I found Joe Cappa's animated short "**Ghost Dogs**" particularly inspiring. A scene occurs in the film in which the character looks down a supernaturally produced hallway, which grows infinitely long and increasingly distorted (Cappa 2022). The surreal style and fluidly shifting spatial distortions Cappa achieves are qualities I wanted to emulate in my own work.

Precedents

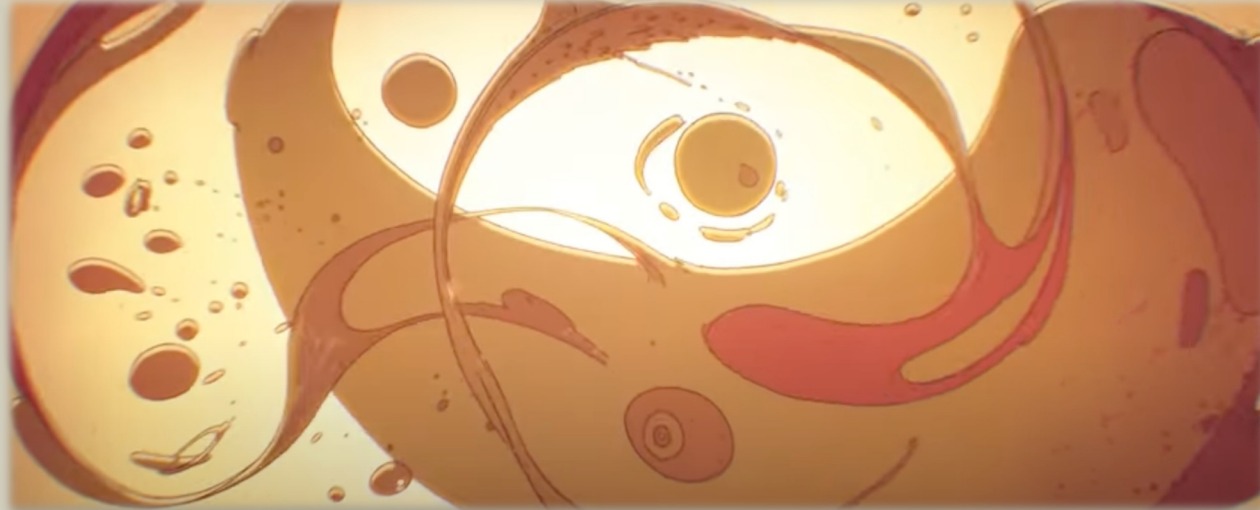


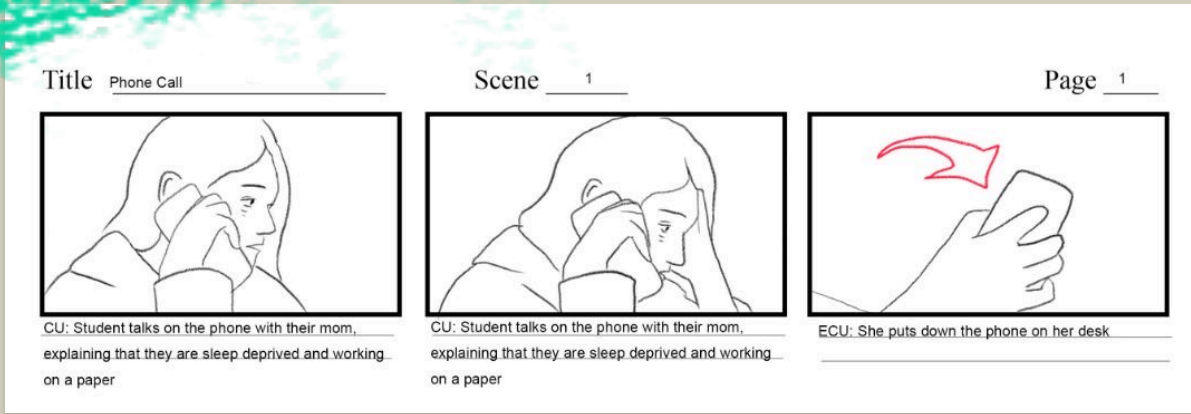
Figure 4. Frame from *"The Night I Dance With Death."* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIBR90hzYEc>.

Another project I took inspiration from that makes use of this fluid, surreal animation style is Vincent Gibaud's short **"The Night I Dance with Death."** In the short, characters and objects melt and morph together, forming fluid abstract forms, an effect I wanted to capture in my portal scene.



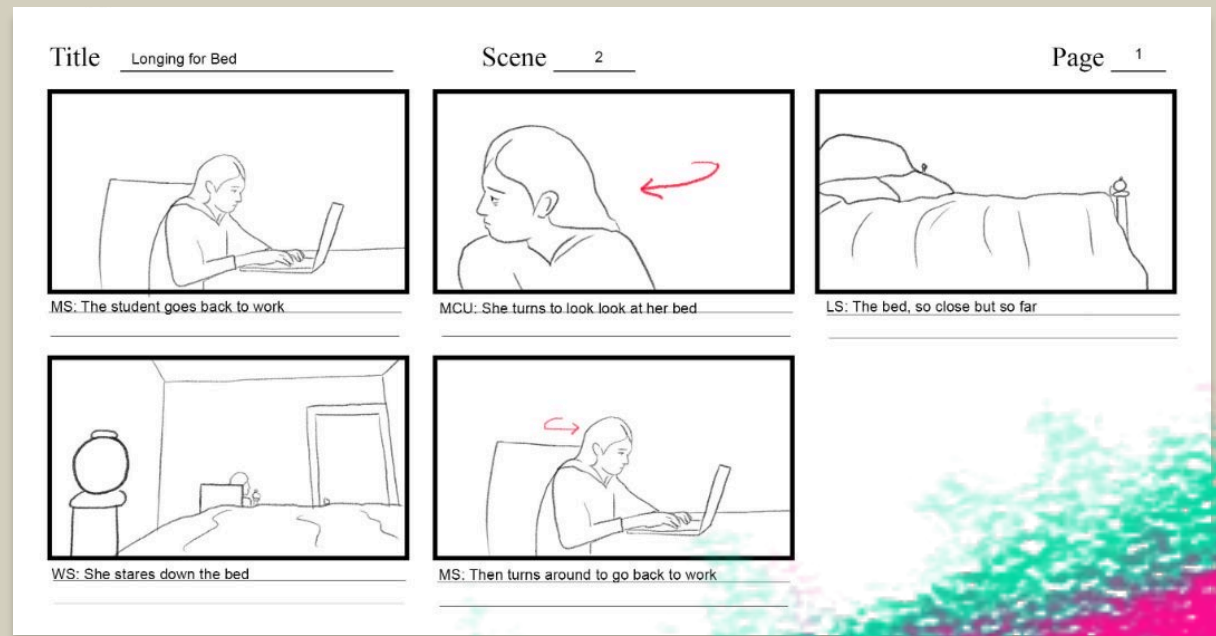
Pre-Production

Storyboard

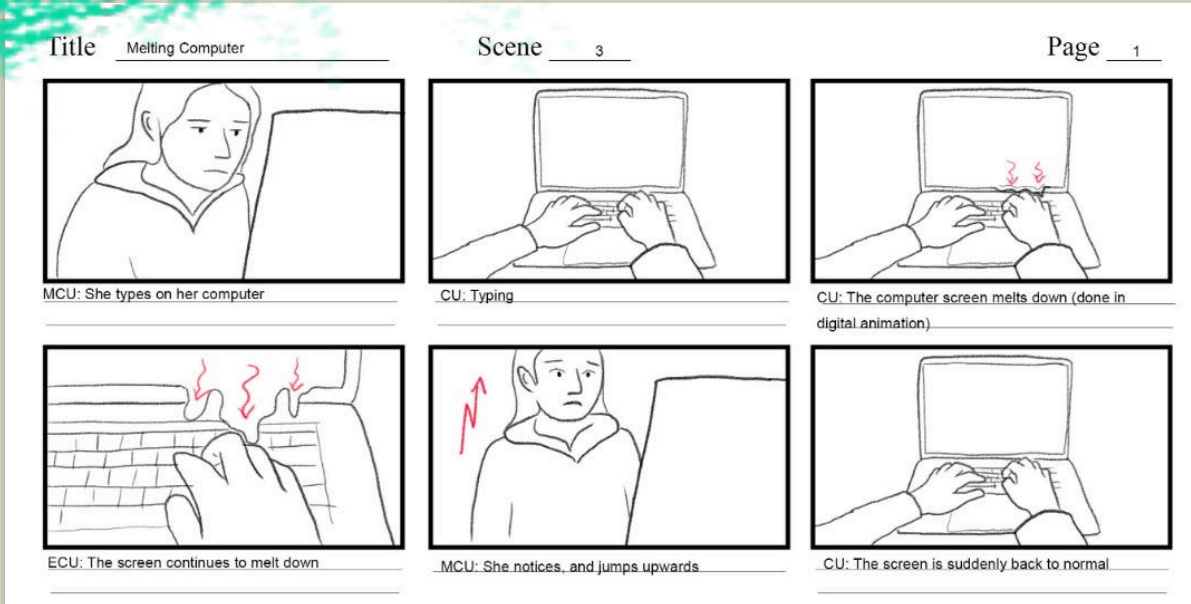


I began the pre-production process by creating storyboards to outline the narrative of the piece. Scene 1 (pictured to the left) is an expository scene in which the student talks on the phone about her state of sleep deprivation and the urgency of finishing the project she is working on.

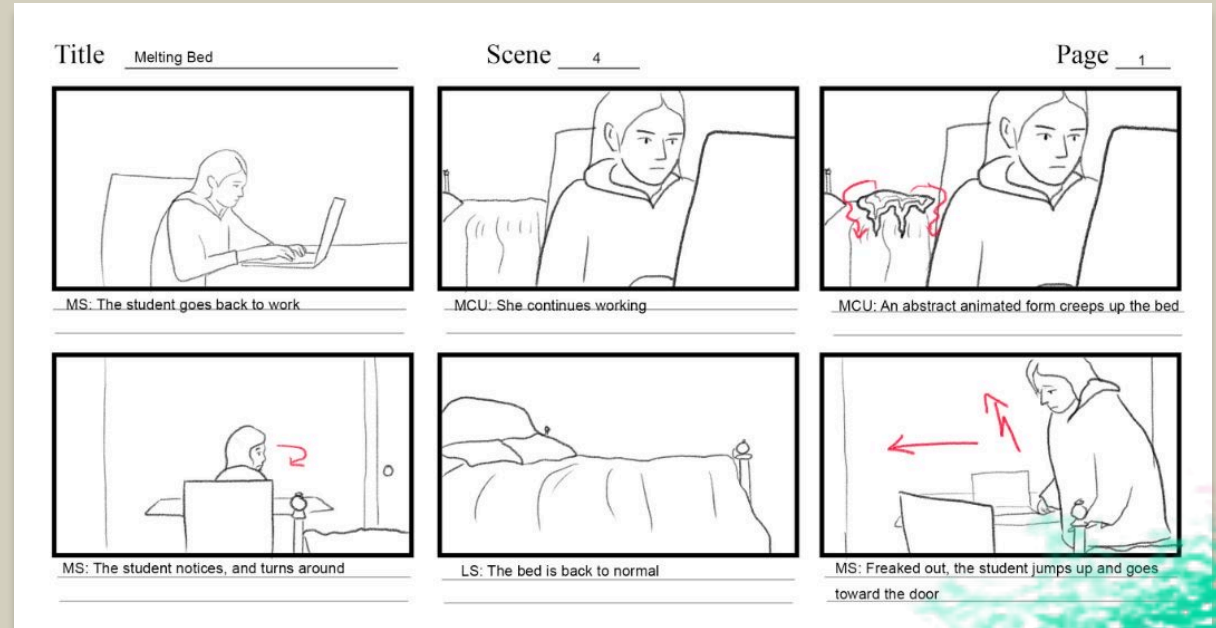
The following scene (pictured to the right) was initially intended to express the character's longing for sleep, though was reworked in post-production to present an initial auditory hallucination.



Storyboard

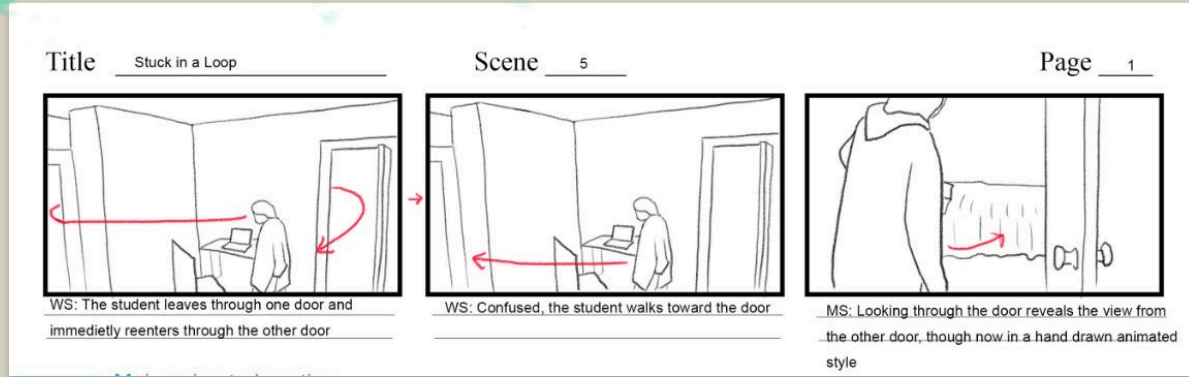


The student then begins to experience a visual distortion, with her computer screen melting onto the keyboard.



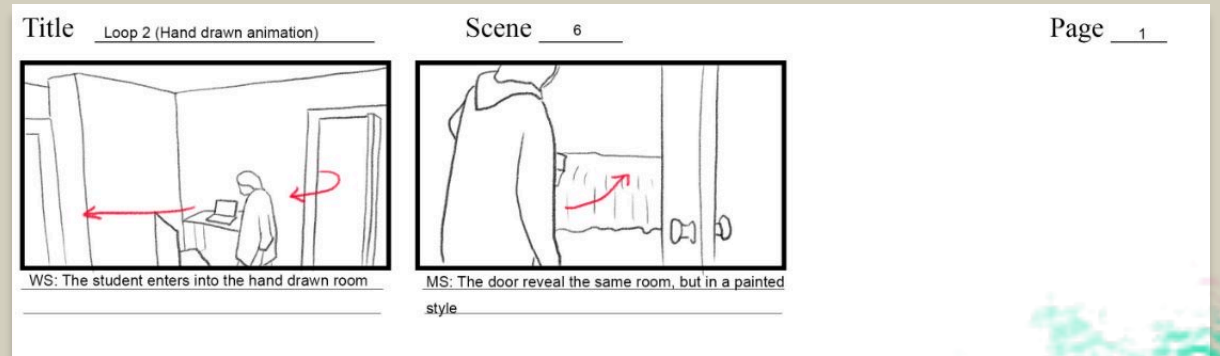
The student returns to work, but experiences a hallucination of a goo-like substance, mimicking the form of the melted computer screen.

Storyboard



The student attempts to leave the room, but discovers the door leads back into her bedroom.

The student loops through the room several times, with the style of animation shifting with each loop. At the point, the character's connection to her physical reality has completely severed.

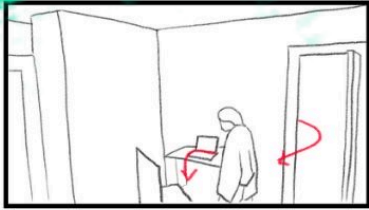


Storyboard

Title Back to Normal? (in stop motion)

Scene 8

Page 1



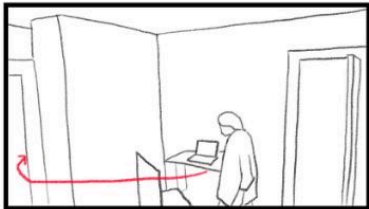
WS: She enter the stop motion room, and sits down



MS: She goes back to work



MS: She notices something is wrong, and exampines her hands



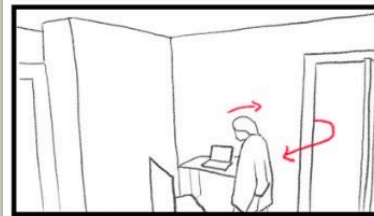
WS: Freaked out, she jumps up and leaves again

The student loops again, and sees the strange goo ooze from the door. She opens the door to find a portal of abstract nonsense.

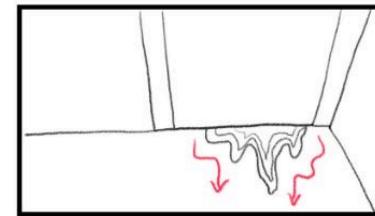
Title Melting Door (done in digital animation)

Scene 9

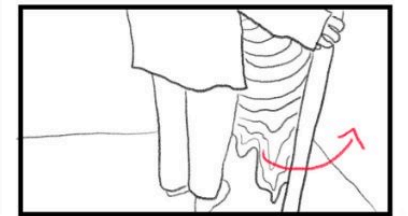
Page 1



WS: She enters into a digital animation style room. She hears a strange noise from the right door, and turns around



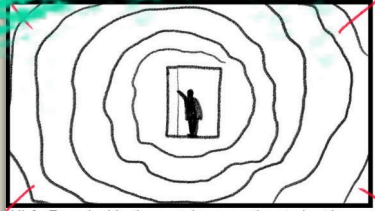
MS: The abstract goo oozes under the door



MS: She opens the door, revealing a strange portal

Storyboard

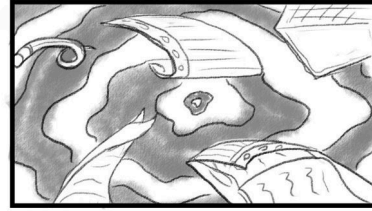
Title Portal (done in digital animation) Scene 10 Page 1



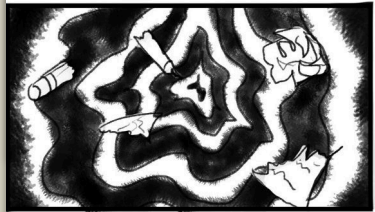
XLS: From inside the portal we see the student in the doorway, growing further in the distance



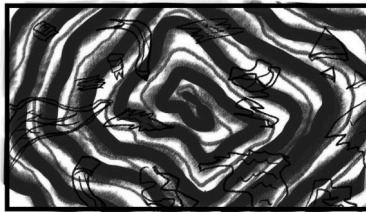
XLS: Objects from the room float down the portal



XLS: The objects float down the portal, morphing in shape



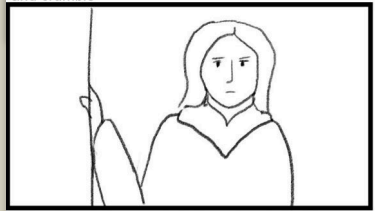
XLS: The colors of the portal grow nauseating in saturation and contrast, as the objects begin to break and crumble



XLS: The objects continue to morph, twist, and break. The stripes of color grow thinner and more saturated



XLS: The objects grow unseeable due to the chaotic colors and closing in lines

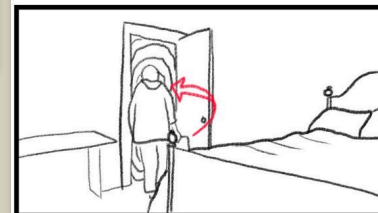


MCU: The portal morphs to form the student in the doorway

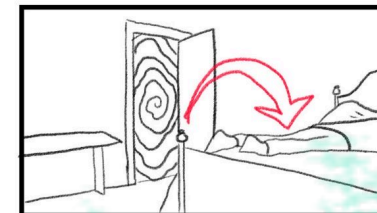
Rather than continue in this state, the student throws her computer into the portal and goes to sleep.

Fragments of her reality float and twist through the abstract portal space. Her space and sanity have completely deteriorated.

Title Bed (done in digital animation) Scene 11 Page 1



LS: The student throws the computer in the portal



LS: ...and jumps into bed

Shot List

IP Shot List

Sc.	#	Type	Description	Elements	Props/Notes	Order	Animation
1	1	ECU	Pick up phone	● Live Action	● Phone	1	
1	2	CU	Phone call	● Live Action	● Phone	3	
1	3	ECU	Put phone down	● Live Action	● Phone	2	
2	1	MCU	Back to work	● Live Action	● Phone ● Computer ● Desk	4	
2	2	CU	Turn head to bed	● Live Action		8	
2	3	WS	Bed	● Live Action	● Bed	13	
2	4	WS	Staring at bed	● Live Action	● Bed ● Desk ● Computer	14	
2	5	MCU	Back to work	● Live Action	● Desk ● Computer	5	
3	1	CU	Yawn	● Live Action		9	
3	2	MS	Computer → melting	● Live Action ● Digital Animation	● Desk ● Computer	15	1
3	3	CU	Melting computer	● Live Action ● Digital Animation	● Desk ● Computer	17	2
3	4	MCU	Jolt up	● Live Action		10	
3	5	MS	Computer	● Live Action	● Desk	16	

To prepare for production, I constructed a shot list, and ordered the shots to make the shooting process most efficient. The shot list notes which shots have live-action elements, animated elements, or both.

Shot List

					• Computer		
4	1	MS	Back to work	• Live Action	• Desk • Computer	6	
4	2	CU	Deep focus → abstract disruption	• Live Action • Digital Animation		11	3
4	3	CU	Quick turn	• Live Action		18	
4	4	WS	Normal room	• Live Action	• Bed	19	
4	5	WS	Hops up	• Live Action	• Desk • Chair	20	
5	1	LS	Exit and reenter	• Live Action	• Doors	21	
5	2	MS	Look through and enter	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	25	4
6	1	LS	Walk through	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Doors	22	5
6	2	MS	Exit	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	26	6
7	1	LS	Walk through	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Doors	22	7
7	2	MS	Exit	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	27	8
8	1	LS	Enter and sit	• Live Action • Stop motion	• Door • Desk	12	18
8	2	MS	Back to work	• Live Action • Stop motion	• Desk • Computer	7	19
8	3	MS	Look at hands	• Live Action • Stop motion		33	20
8	4	LS	Jump up and leave	• Live Action • Stop motion	• Door	23	21
9	1	LS	Reenter in final style	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Doors	24	9
9	2	MCU	Head turn	• Live Action • Digital Animation		34	10
9	3	CU	Goo from under door	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	32	11
9	4	LS	Open door for portal	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	28	12
10	1	LS	Inside portal	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door	29	13
10	2	LS	Animations inside portal	• Digital Animation	★ Note: add additional scenes after shooting		14
10	3	CU	Abstract animations form student in	• Live Action • Digital	• Door	30	15

			doorway	Animation			
11	1	LS	Throws computer into portal	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Door ★ Note: use fake object and draw computer over it or throw computer onto soft surface in doorway	31	16
11	2	LS	Get into bed	• Live Action • Digital Animation	• Bed	14	17

Production



Production

Entering production, I staged my room and appearance to match that of a sleep-deprived college student. I put much thought into the objects cluttering the space (such as books, energy drinks, sleep supplements, etc.) to relate to the project's subject matter, though limited the set dressing to allow for fewer continuity errors and a smoother setup for each shot.





Project Link

Reflection



Given the labor-intensive nature of digital animation, the animated portions took up the bulk of the production time. Ironically, I found it quite difficult to put a sufficient amount of effort into the project and not deprive myself of sleep. Entering into this project, I was determined to get a healthy amount of sleep throughout the process, though I often failed to achieve this goal. I frequently felt an internal pressure to sacrifice my health to perfect an aspect of the project, and I often gave into this pressure. For future work, I want to explore setting rigid limits on work time to protect my sleep, and see how these limits manifest in the outcome of the project.

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