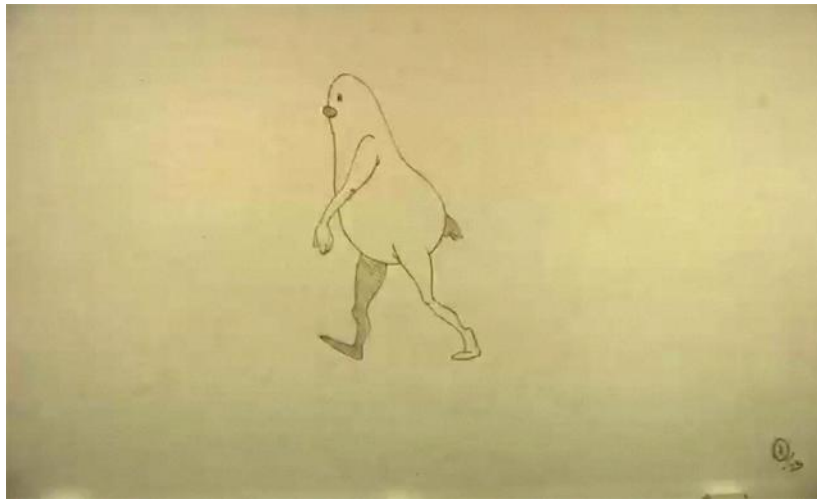


Nick Grundler
Integrative Project Thesis

Traditional pencil and paper animation is the most personal and fluid way to animate. Unlike computer animation, hand-drawings reflect the direct, gestural movements of the artist's hand as he feels the weight and pose of his character. Raw, man-made drawings have an aura about them that even the best computer animation cannot replicate. Try as it might, a 3D puppet will not have the same impact as a well-made drawing, much the same way a digital painting will never quite have the same texture and warmth as oil on canvas. I have chosen to animate completely traditionally, with pencil and paper, so that my work will be as personal as possible. Each frame has been drawn by hand, so that the only computer-aided steps will be the compiling and editing; all the creative legwork, from the storyboards to the character designs, has been done without computers.

Before I started this project, I liked drawing and designing characters, but had very little actual experience animating. I had experimented with animating in Flash, made some flipbooks, and done a couple walk-cycles in Maya. I had always loved old Disney films like “The Jungle Book,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and “101 Dalmatians,” as well as Hayao Miyazaki’s films from Studio Ghibli, like “Spirited Away,” and I’ve wanted to be a part of the filmmaking process somehow. Animation appealed to me greatly, because designing a character is one thing, but making it move is entirely another. Movement defines a character just as much as his appearance; part of designing a character is suggesting how he moves through what he looks like. My sketchbooks have always been filled with characters, so that’s how I started with this project. I just started

drawing simple characters that would be fun to animate. I did a walk-cycle with one, to get my feet wet. Walk cycles are regarded as one of the harder things to do well in animation, so I decided to start with one in order to force myself to respond to as many of the different aspects of making a character come to life as possible, such as adding weight to the motion, and timing and spacing my drawings.

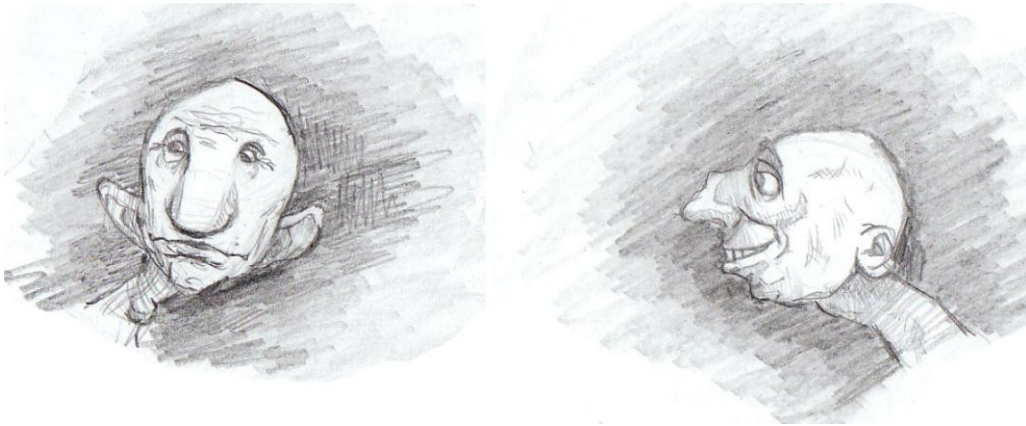


How many frames until his weight shifts from one leg to another? How far forward does he throw his arms? I had never asked myself questions like these, and this was a fantastic exercise for that. After that, I did more sketching, and another piece of animation in which the character takes a single leap across the page, instead of acting in place. I then attempted to do a longer, more cohesive piece that was more than just walking. It was less successful than I would have liked; some of the movements felt too slow and the piece as a whole was not as cohesive as it could have been. The story itself was not very engaging, and the backgrounds I chose to use were too detailed and just ended up being confusing.



It did, however, help in identifying many things that I needed to pay particular attention to later in the year during my final project. I had suspected in my smaller pieces that I was going to have difficulty staying “on model,” or making sure my character looked the same as he did at the start of a scene after I’d animated him moving across the page, and this was certainly the case. It brought to light some timing issues, namely the lack of snappy motion that makes animation interesting to look at. If everything is timed out equally it all looks like it is taking place underwater, with slow and even motion. For my later pieces, I wanted to address these issues as well as create characters that were simple, as well as staying true to ones that I might sketch without them having been designed specifically for animation. All my previous characters had been drawn with a very discerning eye towards eliminating excess line that would increase the difficulty and time it took to make an animation. I had found them boring to draw, which lead to them getting sloppy, which in turn lead to poor animation.

My process has always started with a sketch. Sometimes I see a goofy looking person with really interesting features that I'd like to incorporate, or I might just be doodling and seeing what odd shapes or proportions might make for interesting characters.



Specifically, features like eyes and noses are excellent tools for defining character. Large eyes, for example, help sell emotion. Exaggerating the lids can push the eyes back into the sockets for a sunken, hollow feeling, or baggy ones can also add age, despair, or exhaustion. By paying attention to these things I usually end up with an interesting character who has a lot of life about him, who looks like he belongs somewhere or should be moving in a certain way. A character with a large upper body, for example, suggests a slower, heavier more plodding pace, which I experimented with in my monster study. He uses his large torso and arms to throw himself forward into his step.



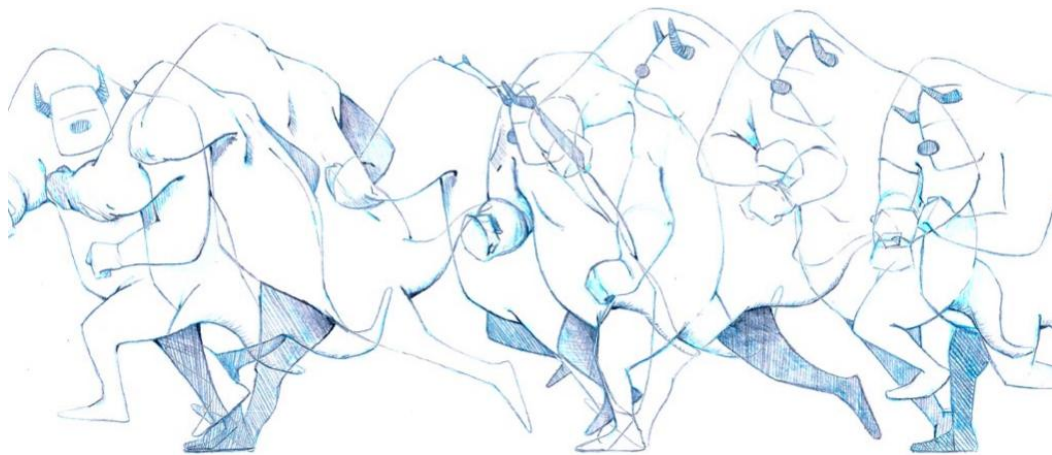
Once the initial sketching has been done and I've found an interesting character, I'll draw him from different angles, maybe some key poses if I've designed him with a specific type of movement in mind. To use the monster again, my very first drawing was him in a rather exaggerated sneaking pose, hunched over, trying to be quiet and stealthy despite his weight, and that instantly suggested the final motion and key drawings I used. After I settled on an appearance for him, the keys followed, namely placing one drawing per stride across the page. These tell us he is simply running across the screen, and nothing more. The breakdown drawings define *how* he is running. In this case, I drew him in the position at which all of the weight has fully transferred to one leg, and his next leg is sweeping past, getting ready to catch him as he falls from his stride.



This is also called the Passing Position. I've also used this pose as my "down," as well, meaning this position is the lowest point at which the character will be in his stride. This gives him an almost bouncy, hurried step. After those important poses are drawn, it becomes a matter of timing and spacing my in-between drawings to smooth out the overall motion, and add some extra touches. In this instance, I added to the movement by having him quickly shift his weight forwards by throwing out an arm/shoulder and twisting his torso into his next step, to show that he was quite top heavy and used this fact to help him move.

My final installation and how I decided to present my work has a lot to do with the fact that I am not entirely happy with how everything turned out. At the onset of the first semester, I had intended to produce a small film, detailing my studies, with stills of process sketches and character designs showing in between clips of animation. As the year progressed, I grew frustrated with the quality of my work, which suffered as a result of poor design decisions. For one of the last pieces I produced, the trackers following the monster with the spyglass and magnifying glass, the designs I chose did not correspond with my ability to animate. I started on that piece intending it to be a short narrative focusing as much on story as on animation, but I grew increasingly frustrated with it as time went on and did not finish the story completely. I made the decision to use characters which were more detailed and difficult to animate, which caused me to spend more time making sure the drawings were accurate and less time actually animating and concerning myself with the piece as a whole. I eventually stopped working on that piece as it was sapping my will to do anything creative at all. I animated the monster, just to prove to myself that I could produce a piece of animation that I could be happy with.

After that, I decided that my body of work did not have the sense of polish or finality that an audience would expect when going to a movie theater. I changed direction slightly and decided to display my work in a manner which focused much more on the process than the product, and recreated my studio-space in the gallery. Using my animation desk as a centerpiece, I surrounded the wall behind it with early sketches and character designs. My animation studies were projected on a sheet of Mylar behind a Plexiglas reproduction of my animation disc. Finished sheets of animation were set next to it so viewers could see the raw drawings from which I made the animations that they saw behind the disc. I also included a short breakdown on the monster cycles, in which he leaves a ghost image of himself in the playback, so the audience can see how the animation was constructed.



In a way, this presentation is a far more honest display of my work than a video ever would have been. I spent most of this year bent over my desk, sketching, drawing, and experimenting. Through an instillation, I can communicate this very clearly. Just as

a piece of hand-drawn animation has a more physical and visual “punch” to it than a computer-generated image, seeing my process and my drawings in person conveys much more about me as an artist than a screen ever could.

