

Proposal: I am proposing an animated installation that explores communication and collaboration as a method of seeking equilibrium within dichotomies. This project is an opportunity to investigate depolarization tactics, dichotomies and where I fit in the grey area between them. I suffer from bipolar disorder, and I quite obviously don't fit into either gender binary, so existing in the grey space is something I've had to embrace. I've learned to accept the paradoxical incompleteness of my identity, to accept that I will be a different me each day that I wake. I've observed that in many ways, my identity reflects the world around me. This collaborative animated investigation is helping me to ground my abstract existence within space and time, and the people around me.

The jumping off point for this project came from exposure to the book *GödelEscherBach* by Douglas Hofstadter in a class taught by Sean Yeager. The book examines analogy, incompleteness and irony through the intersections of Gödel, a mathematician, Bach a composer, and Escher a visual artist. It blurs the perceived lines of separation between art, math, music and language.¹ To better understand the limits of my own ability to comprehend and communicate these ideas, I sat down with Sean to discuss my line of inquiry, which is: How do humans engage with paradox? His response, "well, we do and don't deal with it. We have to deal with it and yet we can't. We're immersed in it; It's the water that we're swimming in." This analogy between paradox and water was particularly exciting because water has been the lens I have used to understand identity and the fluidity that characterizes it.

The main characters in this proposed film include water, oil, a hand and a sphere. An emulsion, similar to equilibrium, is a stable mixture of two or more liquids that would not normally mix. For example, catalysts like salt and detergent can create an emulsion between oil and water, cohering the immiscible. Water and oil embody paradoxical dichotomies; They are the conflict of nature and capitalism, failure and success, self and other, ego and nonego. They must acknowledge and coexist with the same paradoxical polarization that water and oil share when combined.

This dichotomy is further reinforced by the hand and sphere. The hand plays the role of humanity, ego, control and capital, while the sphere represents harmony and the nonego of nature. The narrative of this film is structured to illustrate that awareness and empathy can act like a catalyst for equilibrium by destabilizing binary polarization between immiscible concepts.

¹ Hofstadter, Douglas R., 1945-. *Gödel, Escher, Bach : An Eternal Golden Braid*. New York :Basic Books, 1979.

Polarization is intertwined with the Egocentric Predicament, a term coined by philosopher Ralph Barton Perry. This is defined as the problem of not being able to view reality outside of our own individual perceptions. According to Perry, all that we see and understand is nothing more than a mental representation of information filtered by our sensory systems, our assumptions and biases. This idea led American philosopher, Everett W. Hall to craft "the categorio-centric predicament" to express the futility of seeing the world outside the "categories" imposed by native language.² Until we begin to shift and expand the ways we communicate to fit our world as it becomes more fluid, complex and nuanced.

Languages are often reformed over time by those with the power and authority to do so. English for example has evolved to represent the cisnormative, heteronormative, imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy it was created in. Why not modify words as the world around them shift and change? Why not acknowledge and embrace that fact that we all define words, and reality, differently? Perhaps we can then create an alternative system of collective reality more fit for those our current system of language fails to represent. At the very least, we can create a dialogue. I believe that miscommunication is the source of nearly all conflict. We must prioritize communication and collaboration in order to engage in the discourse that paradox and capitalism creates. The installation that this film will exist within will include collaborative mark-making, more interviews, interactive performance, and group conversations. I will use the mediatheque to create a safe space for honest communication and participation. By utilizing open-minded and active listening, I want to re-define what facilitation and collaboration means to me. By combining with Briar Park's Hyperflat collective and screening my film within an installation of our live collaborative drawings and performances, these projects can coexist and amplify one another.

This collaborative installation and film aims to change the future through encouraging awareness of attachment to the past and present. It aims to seek connections and accept differences. It walks the line between confrontation and meditation, embracing the paradox of *Radical Dharma*. I'll conclude with this quote from *Radical Dharma* by Rev angel Kyodo williams:

“Without inner change there can be no outer change. Without collective change, no change matters.”³

² Buford, Thomas O. *Essays on Other Minds*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970.

³ Owens, Lama Rod., and Rev angel Kyodo williams. *Radical Dharma*. North Atlantic Books, u.s., 2016.

Annotated Bibliography:

Ahuja, Vinay. "Thrive Global." Thrive Global. Accessed December 04, 2018. <https://www.thriveglobal.com/stories/finding-flow-in-the-unconscious-conscious/>.

- On Flow States, the relationship between the creative process, subconsciousness, and consciousness. A balance between.
- Comparative to Salvador Dali's process of accessing this state through meditation and extracting imagery from subconscious visions.
- "It is understandable that, the activities that put us in "unconscious flow" are result of conscious flow state efforts on someone's part."

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Baldwin, James, Steve Schapiro, John Lewis, and Gloria Karefa-Smart. *The Fire next Time*. Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2017.

- Systems of reality, filtered by our sensory systems, assumptions and biases.
- Relevant relationships between Capitalism, Race, and Healing.
- Awareness and arrive at reality:
 - "I know that people can be better than they are. We are capable of bearing a great burden, once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is." (91)
 - "It is one thing to overthrow a dictator or repel an invader and quite another thing really to achieve revolution." (90)
 - "Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. (95)
 - "Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, the only fact we have. It seems to me that one ought to rejoice in the fact of death--ought to decide, indeed, to earn one's death by confronting with passion the conundrum of life. One is responsible for life: It is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we shall return." (91-92)
- Optimism in the face of despair and inequality. Where do we go from here? What do we do with reality once we arrive there?
- Is it possible to arrive at reality? No, but it is necessary to try.
- Passing down experiential knowledge to the next generation.
- Who gets to be shelter and who doesn't?

Capra, Fritjof. *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2010.

- "Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science. But man needs both."
- Synthesis of science/academia/knowledge with intuition/abstraction/mysticism/art

Hofstadter, Douglas R., 1945-. *Gödel, Escher, Bach : An Eternal Golden Braid*. New York :Basic Books, 1979.

- "This idea that there is generality in the specific is of far-reaching importance."
- We are all strange loops, we can only understand what's above the surface, and we must accept this futility
- "There are 17 languages in India, and 462 dialects." There is something strange about the precise statements like that, when the concepts "language" and "dialect" are themselves fuzzy."
- "It turns out that an eerie type of chaos can lurk just behind a facade of order - and yet, deep inside the chaos lurks an even eerier type of order."
- "I would like to understand things better, but I don't want to understand them perfectly."
- Learning to acknowledge, understand, and accept the reality of paradox
- What is the relationship between complexity, chaos, and paradox?

Ricard, Matthieu, and Xuan Thuan. Trinh. *The Quantum and the Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007.

- Written as a dialogue between beloved friends
- Intersections of Science and Buddhism
- Academia vs Spirituality
- "knowledge of our spirits and knowledge of the world are mutually enlightening and empowering."

"Sacred Geometry: Philosophy & Practice (Art and ..." Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Geometry-Philosophy-Practice-Imagination/dp/0500810303>.

- "Our visual sense differs from our sense of touch only because the nerves of the retina are not tuned to the same range of frequencies as are the nerves embedded in our skin. If our tactile or haptic sensibilities were responsive to the same

frequencies as our eyes, then all material objects would be perceived to be as ethereal as projections of light and shadow. Our different perceptual faculties such as sight, hearing, touch and smell are a result then of various proportioned reductions of one vast spectrum of vibratory frequencies. We can understand these proportional relationships as a sort of geometry of perception.”

- Densely packed with information like GEB, eliminates connections between Mathematics, Neuroscience, and Psychology.
- Egocentric Predicament in another context

Spahr, Juliana. *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*. 1st ed. 2005.

- What unites us human beings? What unites us as living beings?
- How can we feel connected to others/find community without sacrificing our individuality or boxing others in?
- Is this a memoir? A collection of autobiographies?
- Why has there never been a time in human history where there wasn't a war going on? What conditions allow wars to survive/occur?
- Can we prevent violence? Is there ever an appropriate time to use violence?

Strosberg, Eliane. *Art & Science*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2001.

- What can artists and scientists learn from one another?
- Why are these things equated as opposite?
- What can art accomplish that science cannot and vice versa?
- “Individual chapters explore how science has shaped architecture in every culture and civilization; how mathematical principles and materials science have underpinned the decorative arts; how the psychology of perception has spurred the development of painting; how graphic design and illustration have evolved in tandem with methods of scientific research; and how breakthroughs in the physical sciences have transformed the performing arts. Some 265 illustrations, ranging from masterworks by Dürer and Leonardo to the dazzling vistas revealed by fractal geometry, complement the wide-ranging text.”

Trinh, Xuan Thuan. *Chaos and Harmony: Perspectives on Scientific Revolutions of the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006.

- “Describes the process through which constraining and sterile determinism was challenged, transformed and swept aside by contingency, which took a prominent place in fields as diverse as cosmology, astrophysics, geology, biology, and genetics. This book traces the view of reality as dependent on natural laws, and on a series of historical events.”
- If reality is chaotic, must we accept chaos in order to understand it?

Zukav, Gary. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. London: Ebury Digital, 2012.

- More Theology vs. Physics, expands on the connection between the scientific process and the creative process.
- How can we make academia accessible? How can we make art accessible?

Artist: Monica McGrane

Title: Threshøld

Hours: Over 1 year

Artist Statement:

Monica McGrane is an experimental animator, and this 3 minute abstract, animated film titled *Threshøld* is part of a continuing investigation into the concept of paradox. The question from which this project was born is: How can we become better equipped to navigate social and political discourse by learning about paradox? The narrative of this film is a personal reflection on the evolution Monica's identity over time. It analyzes their struggles with attachment, perfection, duality, and obsession and relates these experiences to the outside world. The use of oppositional imagery such as black and white, red and blue, oil and water reference a balance between concepts we consider immiscible, like "abstraction and representation, fact and fiction, order and chaos."⁴ They propose these illusionary oppositions are in reality dependent on one another, such that we must know light in order to understand the vastness of the dark, and vice versa. We must sleep and dream in order to be fully aware in waking life. The central thesis of this animation and performance is that we must learn to listen to ourselves in order to listen to one another, and we must listen to one another if we want to make radical change.

⁴ "Paradox." Illuminations. Accessed April 30, 2019. <https://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/product/paradox/>.

Abstract:

Monica McGrane is an experimental animator, and this 3 minute abstract, animated film titled *Threshøld* is part of a continuing investigation into the concept of paradox. The question from which this project was born is: How can we become better equipped to navigate social and political discourse by learning about paradox? The narrative of this film is a personal reflection on the evolution Monica's identity over time. It analyzes their struggles with attachment, perfection, duality, and obsession and relates these experiences to the outside world. The use of oppositional imagery such as black and white, red and blue, oil and water reference a balance between concepts we consider immiscible, like "abstraction and representation, fact and fiction, order and chaos."⁵ They propose these illusionary oppositions are in reality dependent on one another, such that we must know light in order to understand the vastness of the dark, and vice versa. We must sleep and dream in order to be fully aware in waking life. The central thesis of this animation and performance is that we must learn to listen to ourselves in order to listen to one another, and we must listen to one another if we want to make radical change.

The paradox that surrounds this claim is that is impossible to truly know oneself. As Heraclitus said, "The only constant is change,"⁶ and we are exponentially evolving, although sometimes it may not feel like it. While this notion implies uncertainty, it is liberating in that each day we are a new version of ourselves and every moment is an opportunity to be better. We are free to be curious about ourselves, encouraging us to listen to ourselves as we would to a mentor or a loved one. Rev. angel Kyodo williams summarizes it as, "Without inner change there can be no outer change. Without collective change, no change matters."⁷ In the making of this film, this has been my mantra.

⁵ "Paradox." Illuminations. Accessed April 30, 2019. <https://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/product/paradox/>.

⁶ Mark, Joshua J. "Heraclitus_of_Ephesus." Ancient History Encyclopedia. April 29, 2019.

⁷ Owens, Lama Rod., and Rev angel Kyodo williams. *Radical Dharma*. North Atlantic Books, u.s., 2016.

Defense Paper/Speech Transcript:

My name is Monica McGrane, and I'm an experimental animator. This 3 minute abstract, animated film, titled Threshold, is part of a continuing investigation into the concept of paradox. I started this project by asking, how do humans handle self contradiction and confrontation from others? How can we become better equipped to navigate social and political discourse by learning about paradox? I engaged with these questions by exploring how paradox effects my own life before looking for it around me. The narrative of this film is a personal reflection on the evolution of my identity over time. It analyzes my struggles with attachment, perfection, duality, and obsession and relates these experiences to the world outside myself. The use of oppositional imagery such as black and white, red and blue, oil and water reference a balance between concepts we consider immiscible, like "abstraction and representation, fact and fiction, order and chaos,"⁸ the didactic and the ambiguous. These illusionary oppositions are in reality dependent on one another. We must know light in order to understand the vastness of the dark, and vice versa. We must sleep and dream in order to be fully aware in waking life. My central thesis is that we must learn to listen to ourselves in order to listen to one another, and we must listen to one another if we want to make radical change.

The paradox that surrounds this claim is that is impossible to truly know oneself. As Heraclitus said, "The only constant is change,"⁹ and we are exponentially evolving, although sometimes it may not feel like it. While this notion implies uncertainty, it is liberating in that each day we are a new version of ourselves and every moment is an opportunity to be better. We

⁸ "Paradox." Art21. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s4/paradox/>.

⁹ Mark, Joshua J. "Heraclitus_of_Ephesus." Ancient History Encyclopedia. May 14, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://www.ancient.eu/Heraclitus_of_Ephesos/.

are free to be curious about ourselves, encouraging us to listen to ourselves as we would to a mentor or a loved one. Rev. angel Kyodo williams summarizes it as, “Without inner change there can be no outer change. Without collective change, no change matters.”¹⁰ In the making of this film, this has been my mantra.

My interest in paradox began 2 years ago after a class taught here by Sean Yeager on a book called *Godël Escher Bach*. The concepts in GEB were so relevant and fascinating to me, but it’s an intensely complex book and even after years of digesting Hofstadter’s notions of loops and paradox, I am still figuring it out to be honest. The inaccessibility of Hofstadter’s writing made it frustratingly difficult for me to grasp, so I started to divert my focus into methods of understanding and articulating complexity. This line of inquiry has brought me to a profound appreciation of the balance between generality and specificity, art and science, abstraction and realism, water and oil.

Before elaborating more on this delicate balance, I want to go back to paradox and loops. It took Hofstadter 777 pages to articulate the significance of paradox and loops in GEB, but I’m going try in a few sentences. For a pianist, loops are like the left hand keeping rhythm while paradox is like the right hand playing the melody. Loops are work, paradox is play. They can be considered both dualistic and interdependent in that, if paradox is to the ambiguous, then loops are to the didactic.¹¹ More specifically, a paradox is is self contradiction, a statement who’s opposition is also true. Paradox is all around us, it fuels arguments and conflicts but it also highlights the flaws of our systems, particularly of exclusionary language, hierarchies and

¹⁰ Owens, Lama Rod., and Rev angel Kyodo williams. *Radical Dharma*. North Atlantic Books, u.s., 2016.

¹¹ Thompson, Nato. *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2015.

dichotomies. It also exposes that reality is not as black and white as we describe it as, and the complexity that this creates can be overwhelming. In one of multiple interviews I've had with Sean Yeager, I asked him, "How do humans engage with paradox, and how could we do better?" His response to this was, "We do and don't deal with it. We have to deal with it and yet we can't. We're immersed in it; It's the water that we're swimming in."¹²

Loops, on the other hand, model recursion; it's a cycle who's starting point is also it's ending point. Loops are when I get in my creative flow state, when I'm meditating, or when I'm skateboarding, trying the same trick over and over until I get it right. Loops can help us get very close to perfection, but never all the way there. But there is a great beauty in that futility. In animation we use these loops often to improve efficiency and speed up the laborious process of making a 'finished piece,' just as you would in programming or music production. But too many loops can make it feel rigid and redundant. Feedback loops, for example cause computers to crash and microphones to make that horrible sound that I'm not going to demonstrate despite the tempting opportunity. Feedback loops are bad habits, like me chain-smoking throughout drawing 4000 frames and writing 4000 words in preparation for this moment. They're like when I have invasive thoughts or obsessive tendencies or like, when I start using the word like too many times. The loops we put our energy into make us who we are, the paradox is, we can change where we distribute that energy. If paradox is the water we're swimming in, then loops are the oil we're coated in.

Alright, back to balance.

¹² Yeager, Sean. "Paradox and Identity." Interview by author. February 9, 2019.

Oil always separates and rises to the top, unless it is forced into a mixture with some kind of emulsifier. In this film, the conflict between water and oil represents a struggle for paradox and loops to find harmony. In GEB Hofstadter focuses on what he calls strange loops, an emulsion of paradox and loops that looks something like this, (Slide 4) a loop within a loop. In Hofstadter's book called *I Am a Strange Loop*, he defines them as follows:

...“when I say "strange loop", I have something else in mind — a less concrete, more elusive notion. What I mean by "strange loop" is — here goes a first stab, anyway — not a physical circuit but an abstract loop in which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling-around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in a hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive "upward" shifts turn out to give rise to a closed cycle. That is, despite one's sense of departing ever further from one's origin, one winds up, to one's shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop." (pp. 101-102)¹³

In the first scene, I used a technique called weaving loops that I discovered from RISD graduate Caleb Woods. He shows his process and explains his techniques through open source videos online, something I have plans to do in the afterlife of this project. Weaving loops are sort of how I envision and express strange loops as Hofstadter describes them, cycles which evolve as they revolve. The intricacy this creates is reminiscent of fractals and the infinite complexity found in nature.

Last Hofstadter quote I swear, from GEB: he said “I would like to understand things better, but I don't want to understand them perfectly.”¹⁴ This desire is something that's helped me navigate this project as well as my daily life in the current political climate. It's an acceptance of the futility of knowledge, we may chase it infinitely, but the truest reality that we too often deny is that we don't know.

¹³ Hofstadter, Douglas. *I Am a Strange Loop*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

¹⁴ Hofstadter, Douglas R. Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

In science and mathematics, we usually consider that which is repetitive or consistent to be valid, but in experienced reality repetition does not equal truth. I experience loops as autopilot, daydreams, habits, assumptions, biases, comfort. We are calmed by the familiar and fear discomfort, contradiction and change. Paradox, therefore, is something we tend to avoid if possible, it makes us uncomfortable. We categorize the complex world around us into oppositions in order to understand and communicate it. Reality is far more nuanced than our language makes space for, and paradox exposes the fact that there are no absolutes, there is always some outlier to consider. Our reality shapes our language and language shapes how we experience and communicate reality.

I believe miscommunication is the root of nearly all conflict, and have therefore been exploring ways to make communication more fun, accessible and inclusive by considering art, music, and spirituality as valid and necessary languages. When it comes to communicating emotions, values, and experiences, mathematics and sciences are not the tools we resort to, art is. In America and most Western cultures we have developed a system of language that focusses on communicating the outside world, but have a lack of structure focusing on the internal world. Seeking this, people turn to art, music, religion, fiction, and dance to explore the realm of the human experience. The arts are not prioritized in our government or public schools. Eastern and indigenous knowledge is either left out of curriculum or distorted for a Western lens. For example, Buddhism was largely popularized by British-American Philosopher Alan Wilson Watts, which led to widespread, appropriation of Eastern philosophies by white Buddhist communities in America. I am careful here not to claim these ideas as my own because they are heavily influenced by ancient concepts surrounding the self and mindfulness that existed long

before my time. This conflict in this film can be summarized by a famous quote by Gautama Buddha himself in which someone asked him, 'I want happiness.' And Buddha said, 'First remove I, that's Ego, then remove want, that's Desire. See now you are left with only Happiness.' The journey of the hand in this narrative moves from curiosity into attachment, greed into ego, and then moves from self awareness to letting go. But the goal of being human is not happiness alone; it's progress, liberation, symbiosis and healing that we seek. The hand may not have found happiness, but it did find balance with it's surroundings. The diamond can represent anything from profit and wealth to love and acceptance to knowledge and power, it is the source of attachment, of desire.

I want to be very clear: This film is titled Threshold because there are no absolutes, there is always a valid contradiction, a line that can't be crossed. Meditation, mindfulness, balance, whatever you want to call it: The purpose is to become aware of this line. Kindness, patience and active listening alone will not stop racist cops and fascists from walking among us, or capitalists from taking advantage of us. Direct action will. Legislation, holding our corporations, our government, and wall street accountable. Funding black trans women and grassroots organizations and nonprofits. Volunteering for those of us who are able, educating ourselves on what our taxes are funding, who our representatives are, and being aware of the systemic destabilization of people of color, the queer community, the differently abled and other marginalized communities. We must become aware of our privileges and use them to and redistribute wealth, resources and power. We must actively depolarize our communities and sit patiently with our emotions and discomfort when we feel defensive.

Another intentional use of loops is to create a balance between action and inaction, also a historically Eastern concept. This is best described in an interview between animated filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki and critic Robert Egbert on his use of pauses and stillness in his films. Robert writes, "I told Miyazaki I love the "gratuitous motion" in his films; instead of every movement being dictated by the story, sometimes people will just sit for a moment, or they will sigh, or look in a running stream, or do something extra, not to advance the story but only to give the sense of time and place and who they are. "We have a word for that in Japanese," he said. "It's called *ma*. Emptiness. It's there intentionally."¹⁵ This elevation of stillness so perfectly portrays how animation and buddhism intersect in my personal practice and daily life. In the fast paced, over stimulating aesthetic of Capitalism, we scarcely prioritize stillness. When we have opportunities for stillness, we check our phones or distract ourselves otherwise. As our attention spans adapt we become increasingly impatient and require more and more stimuli to capture an audience's attention. Miyazaki refutes this, sticking to the tender and tactile process of hand drawn animation.

I made space for hand drawn animation and stillness in this film too, after the hand combusts and sheds its skin, revealing its withered, textured interior. (Slide 8) I have learned through life drawing with Morgan Walker that drawing is a way of crafting meaning, it's a way to experience reality and interacting with the world. To bring it back to paradoxical duality: I compare mark-making and observing to speaking and listening. The key to drawing in my practice is a focussed balance between details and the bigger picture. In an interview I conducted with our Urban Botany professor Bill Becker, we discussed how artists and scientists can work

¹⁵ Ebert, Roger. "Hayao Miyazaki Interview | Interviews | Roger Ebert." RogerEbert.com. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/hayao-miyazaki-interview>.

together to craft a similar balance. Bill expressed that scientists tend to get stuck on the minutiae of things, while artists are able to see the bigger picture and notice abstract interconnections. He said that working with art students at PNCA has helped him find a balance that's benefitted his own practice. We also talked about the similarities between the creative process and the scientific method, both making observations, conducting experiments and developing critical theories. I practice this attention to balance in drawing, in social settings, in animation, skateboarding, and in meditative self-reflection.

I practice meditation wherever I am, on my commute to school and work, falling asleep at night, having my morning coffee, even in class. I focus primarily on the rhythm of my breath and heartbeat, loops that keep us alive, listening carefully to myself, searching for sources of tension in my body and mind. I direct my breath and focus to my toes, ankles, shins all the way up to the crown of my head, letting go of these tensions, then move back down to my toes again, grounding myself to the Earth. I listen closely to the thoughts that pass by as I do this, careful not to get distracted from my focus. I also do this in drawing class. I start by capturing the essence of the thing I'm drawing, the big picture, the composition, marking the page as lightly as possible. I try to stay detached from the piece in this stage, correcting all that does not represent the reference. Once I start to really understand what I am looking at and what I want to create, I take a step back. Then and only then am I ready for values and details. This process repeats until I have come as close to reality as time will allow, then I must accept what I have created and move on. Reality is too complex to understand, it can only be approximated and we each have our own way of doing so. This is where the beauty of our differences shines through, where our perspective, style, and voice develops.

It's an intentional, habitual, strange loop that helps me to identify and replace habits or loops that do not benefit me or those around me. This portion of the film (still slide whatever) was created using this method, over 150 frames of anatomically correct drawings make up almost 8 seconds of content altogether. This part took longer than any other section of the film, and was intended to give me time to reflect on the work I had created up to that point while reinforcing the importance of self reflection through practice. I believe I am drawn to animation because of its tediousness, it gives me a lot of time to think and critique what I'm making and encourages me to be selective and intentional about what is the most important to show.

I want to pause here and be respectful to the sources I am drawing from. The appropriation of Eastern philosophies creates an obstacle for Buddhists of color who are “reworking Orientalist discourses to empower themselves within white Buddhist communities that have marginalized minorities.”¹⁶ The most prominent example of this is queer black Zen Buddhist leader, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, author of *Radical Dharma*. This book was created around an interview between a Buddhist leader and a Scientist about race, capitalism, love and liberation in America and has been the keystone to my thesis research. It was gifted to me by my close friend and collaborator Layna Lewis after I returned from a Global Studios trip to Berlin last summer. At that time I was questioning whether art is effective during times as urgent and violent as Berlin before, during, and after World War II. I was confronted with the paradox that art is not enough on its own, and was considering focussing my energy towards direct action as an organizer and volunteer. It felt like I didn't have the energy to do both, and was doubting my identity as both an artist and activist, seeking a symbiosis of the two. I took classes such as

¹⁶ Adeana McNicholl, *Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 86, Issue 4, December 2018, Pages 883–911, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfy019>

Revolutionary Latin America History and Protest, Propaganda and Patronage, and I learned more about art's role as a tool within and against Fascism and Capitalism. Art, propaganda, and direct action were weapons of the resistance in Berlin, for Emory Douglas and the Black Panther Party, during the Cuban Revolution, the Mexican Revolution,¹⁷ and the Protestant Reformation alike. At the same time, however, propaganda has been used by corrupt leaders in Germany, Mexico, the US, and Soviet Russia throughout the 19th Century. Art is a weapon and, as we can see in the media today, when treated as such must be practiced with intention and accountability.

Radical Dharma gave me faith in the possibility of a balance between activism and art by centering the conversation around conversation itself. By creating art that provides a safe space for inclusive and vulnerable dialogue, I have found that we can create community, foster creativity, and make change. This idea inspired the space we're in now, the intentional synthesis of live music and visual art to immerse the audience in an experience that fosters curiosity. The first screening of this film was also a performance and took place last weekend at the Saturday Market. It was a Guerrilla style jam session and collaboration with alumni Briar Parks and her collective Hyperflat. Hyperflat is a perfect example of the kind of safe spaces for creatives that are needed today. It's a community of artists, animators, filmmakers, performers and musicians that encourages members to try new things and allows us to share skills and experiences with each other. It's an opportunity to abandon ego and the fear of failure, providing the option of full or partial anonymity by wearing masks such as seen here.

Performance and music are a large aspects of this project. When I first came to PNCA I was very independent and uncomfortable sharing my work, but through many critiques, working

¹⁷ Beezley, William and Colin MacLachlan. *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946: An Introduction*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

with our Ukulele Club, and doing public performances with Hyperflat has helped me come outside my shell a lot, both as an artist and performer. In Ukulele Club, I started out feeling very intimidated and scared to be heard, but after four years I'm now the President of it, which mostly involves ordering pizza.

Playing music with other people has helped me gain confidence as a musician and has helped me become more conscious and patient in life. It has been the perfect example of the potential of balancing listening and speaking, playing with others requires that you listen both to listen to yourself and those around you, finding a balance and creating harmony. I encourage anyone who has never played music with or without others to join us on Wednesdays or to collaborate with Hyperflat, it is a wonderful opportunity to have fun, meet new people, and get outside your comfort zone. The friendships we make when we overcome fear and uncertainty together are the one's that last the longest.

This idea of becoming comfortable with discomfort is at the front of this project, the purpose of reflection, listening to the self and others, is to ease us into discomfort by engaging with curiosity. I believe we are taught at a certain point in our educational careers that we are expected to know, expected to have more answers and less questions as we grow older. But consider a child. Kids have nothing but questions and they learn at an exponentially faster rate than adults because in early childhood kids are curiously aware. As we enter middle school, high school, even college and beyond, we grow less curious as we become attached to ideas as right or wrong, true or false. I have worked with kids as a nanny and volunteer before and after college, and have become increasingly inspired by young minds. The fearlessness that comes before we learn to be fearful and insecure gives me hope, and keeps me humble. I often feel like

a big kid wearing an adult costume, and I think a lot of adults as they grow older are in denial of the fact that we are, paradoxically, just big kids with more responsibilities. I think the most exciting and creative ideas are born from childlike curiosity and fearlessness. It's like tapping into an intuitive truth that's always playing in the background but becomes silenced by fear and doubt. If we could find more of a balance between curiosity and certainty as adults, we could begin to let go of the attachments we hold to our ideas and begin to open doors to new ideas.

Everything in life is a lesson, the ups and downs, ebbs and flows, we can learn from it all if we remain curiously aware. Getting out of comfort zones means taking risks, talking to new people who don't look and think like you. I think part of the fear of adulthood is we aren't allowed to fail, and our failures often define us. I failed my initial proposal of this project, and through that failure came the humility I needed to encounter in order to make progress. I became ironically obsessively curious about how my work was received and how I could make these ideas more clear, accessible, and relevant to my audience. I met with my panel members and got one on one feedback, I asked attendants their thoughts and what they did and didn't understand, I sought critique wherever I could find it. I went from confident in my concept, to extremely doubtful, and am now seeking a balance of both. I believe I was meant to fail my proposal, and I wouldn't have had it any other way looking back. Life is like a winding staircase, the horizontal part of each step representing doubt and the vertical representing confidence. We must preserve through and appreciate both our successes and failures in order to make progress. That is my goal as a human and an artist, to keep learning forever, to push myself forward when I start to feel comfortable and be forgiving and patient with myself when I am confronted with discomfort. I don't want to be defensive, I want to be open-minded and curious, and by practicing habits that

bring me closer to this goal I have begun to shape myself into the person I want to be by accepting who I am and where I have to go. To bring it all the back to the beginning, the futility of this goal is that everyday I am new, ever changing, and my idea of who I want to be will change as well. I must be adaptable and mindful if I am to follow this path to its never-end, and I must support others who strive to do the same. If there's one thing I've learned in my 22 short years of life, it's that mindful, kindness, curiosity and patience can take you a long way. I hope each of you here find your own balance through the paradoxes of existence, and have some fun doing so.

Thanks for listening.

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 - Loops contributing to needed rest, comparative to sleeping or developing habits and routines.

4. Hofstadter, Douglas. *I Am a Strange Loop*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
 - Identity as a fluid representation of Strange Loops, elaborates on concepts in GEB
 - Hofstadter mourns and processes the loss of his wife through this book, claiming that strange loops live on in others like a shadow of those we've lost.
 - "Sometimes it seems as though each new step towards AI, rather than producing something which everyone agrees is real intelligence, merely reveals what real intelligence is not. "
 - "In the end, we self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages are little miracles of self-reference."

5. Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
 - Relates Incompleteness Theories from Bach's Cannons, Escher's Paradoxical Drawings, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem.
 - Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence as a result of 'Strange Loops'
 - "Incompleteness Theorem: The first incompleteness theorem states that no consistent system of axioms whose theorems can be listed by an effective procedure (i.e., an algorithm) is capable of proving all truths about the arithmetic of the natural numbers. For any such formal system, there will always be statements about the natural numbers that are true, but that are unprovable within the system. The second incompleteness theorem, an extension of the first, shows that the system cannot demonstrate its own consistency.
 - "What is an "I", and why are such things found (at least so far) only in association with, as poet Russell Edson once wonderfully phrased it, "teetering bulbs of dread and dream" -- that is, only in association with certain kinds of gooey lumps encased in hard protective shells mounted atop mobile pedestals that roam the world on pairs of slightly fuzzy, jointed stilts?"

6. Mark, Joshua J. "Heraclitus_of_Ephesus." Ancient History Encyclopedia. May 14, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://www.ancient.eu/Heraclitus_of_Ephesos/.

- "The only constant is change."

7. Owens, Lama Rod., and Rev angel Kyodo williams. *Radical Dharma*. North Atlantic Books, u.s., 2016.

- Active Listening and the importance of conversation, based around a dialogue between a scientist and a buddhist
- Healing and Liberation through an open, disciplined and skeptical mind. Creating space for healing and productive discourse.
- "We simply cannot engage with either the ills or promises of society if we continue to turn a blind eye to the egregious and willful ignorance that enables us to still not "get it" in so many ways. It is by no means our making, but given the culture we are emerging from and immersed in, we are responsible. White folks' particular reluctance to acknowledge impact as a collective while continuing to benefit from the construct of the collective leaves a wound intact without a dressing. The air needed to breathe through forgiveness is smothered. Healing is suspended for all. Truth is necessary for reconciliation. Will we express the promise of and commitment to liberation for all beings, or will we instead continue a hyper-individualized salvation model—the myth of meritocracy—that is the foundation of this country's untruth?"
- "I'm thinking about my own liberation. I mean, I'm not liberated. Liberation is a process, and I think one of the first important things I had to do is stop believing in my inferiority."

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- One of several interviews conducted with Sean about Godël Escher Bach, Identity, Paradox, and Language. Full Interviews to be edited and posted with Thesis Film online.