

OVER TIME: A Review & Exploration of Labour Practices Through Game Design and The Concept of Time

A CRITIQUE THROUGH PLAYABLE STORY

By

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ABSTRACT

Time is a social construct. We rely on time. Our time is valuable and central to our day-to-day lives. And the company you work for knows that, creating a system that relies on productivity that in turn makes your time a scarce resource. Time is measured objectively but experienced subjectively and thus can be designed in the workplace to coerce and manipulate employees for capitalist gain by convincing us that our time is well spent in the pursuits of labour, leaving our leisure time by the wayside. Framed through iterative, critical, and research-through-design methods, this thesis comments on Western society's culture of the exploitation of creative workers. This takes the form of a playable story whose theme of burnout in the creative workplace embodies the challenges workers face. OVER TIME is an interactive narrative depicting the day in the life of an office worker. It takes place in a physical installation replica of the character's office space, played via an office computer to simulate the parallels between a fictional setting and its real life counterpart, in order to reinforce themes of time, exploitation and self-expression in a contemporary workplace.

Key Words: TIME, BURNOUT, EXPLOITATION, WORK CULTURE, SELF-EXPRESSION, GAME DESIGN, PLAYABLE STORY, ITERATIVE DESIGN, RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN, CRITICAL DESIGN.

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Teachers are the most admirable and important people in the world. You don't have to do it forever but if you're in doubt about what to do, be an amazing teacher... Even if you're not a teacher, be a teacher. Share your ideas. Don't take for granted your education. Rejoice in what you learn and spray it.

- Tim Minchin, 9 Life Lessons

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INTRODUCTION

Time is a fragile thing. The COVID-19 pandemic exemplified the idea that time can simultaneously feel as though it passes in the blink of an eye and yet feels ever so still. This period created a sense of stagnation and unease in many of our lives, for myself the isolation and fear of being alone with my thoughts offered the silver lining of introspective healing and clarity during an otherwise objectively horrible time to exist in. During this time of introspection, I found myself questioning a variety of thoughts that were repressed within my subconscious mind: Why wasn't I making the most of this time off and alone to improve my practice and skills? Why could I never find a job that treated me like a human being? Did I even enjoy what I do? Was I even happy with my life? More importantly, what on earth was I going to make for dinner?

All very pressing questions, most of which dealt with three underlying elements: work expectations, workplace environment, and the overarching anxiety around time. As a creative, I often found myself questioning why I felt unable to progress forward and improve my craft, this was contextualized under the sentiment of "I have the tools but not the time" when working in a fast-paced job that often left me with little to no free time, or "I work within my practice but I am too creatively burnt out to continue when I have the time at home" when in a job related to my field of study, interests, and a (relatively) stable 9-5 work schedule. It was apparent that after spending an entire day doing the very thing I sought to improve, that I was too mentally exhausted to continue for myself in my spare time despite *having* the time, which led to a sense of being unfulfilled, and frankly, peeved at the way my time was structured; shaking my fist in the air, cursing the work and productivity systems I had been adopted into.

This transitional-post-pandemic period brought the rise of a semi-invasive work system that was disguised by (on the surface) accessible and accommodating remote and hybrid work applications that later manifested as digital micro-management, as well as the blurring between personal leisure time and working hours; crunch culture, quiet quitting, as well as the great resignation¹ were movements unveiled during this time to comment on employee resistance to formerly ignored worker exploitation. Simultaneously, this isolation and transition brought light to the desire to resort to hobbies and art as a means of passing the time or even fulfillment. Throughout this, there has been a common acceptance of a seemingly unexplained erasure of time, leaving people feeling like the age they were when the lockdowns first happened and or not clearly remembering the events of the recent years²; approximately three years lost on top of the time already passed when living life on auto-pilot prior to these world events.

¹ Formica and Sfodera, "The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting Paradigm Shifts: An Overview of Current Situation and Future Research Directions."

² Heyes, "The Short and the Long of It."

During the midst of this temporal limbo, my attempts at self-guided studies had failed during the lockdown as there were no real consequences to falling through with self-set goals and milestones. There was no one to blame for this failure, no societal construct to shake my fist at and show resentment towards. The only person to blame was myself and my inability to take my time by the horns and tame it. In retrospect, my time has always been in my hands, even in the workplace, so why wasn't I using it in a way that was sustainable for me all this time? I had turned to academia as a means of diversifying my routine and schedule, attempting to reconnect with my studies and passions by engaging in classes and assignments. In addition to my enjoyment for learning, my reason, amongst others, for returning was to have some external influence prompt me with deadlines to provide me with any mental stimulation and minor stressors that was not already present in my day-to-day life just to *feel* something and make better use of my time, maybe even open the doors to a better work environment not accessible to me prior.

This thesis explores the concept of time as a system designed and structured within the workplace and relationships to self-expression and exploitation within the creative industries, specifically in game development. This is done by designing a playable story using design research methods such as research-through design and critical design. Through a literature review focused on the design of games and the game design workplace, this thesis creates an interactive narrative that uses time as a unifying metaphor conceptually and thematically. Providing a critique of the contemporary workplace to workers and players alike through an installed playable story.

SECTION 1

A REVIEW OF TIME

FOUNDATION

1.1 CORPORATE CAPTIVES

It is through work that we seek to satisfy our craving for a sense of control, of mastery, of security and autonomy in a chaotic, insecure world: this is the gold at the end of the rainbow. The craving is never satisfied, we are always promised more if we work that bit harder.

- Bunting, 2004.

Exploitation in the workplace is not a new concept. In some cases it is a far more innocent exploitation of offering to take on extra work and in turn becoming the person employers and co-workers rely on to pick up the slack. In other cases, and more commonly, expectations are pushed onto the plates of workers with little to no say in the matter³. “Leaving work at work”⁴ was possible in more traditional workplaces as the office setting afforded employees with the physical ability to break away from the tether of their desk and equipment. Within the context of the modern age, technologies emerging as early as the late 90s promised to be revolutionary and innovative in making jobs easier. Technology has provided us the convenience of shifting the need to scour an encyclopedia for hours to find an answer, to using a single voice command towards a smartphone. However, the technologies of today have not yet afforded us the leisure of a sustainable work-life balance, in fact, it has brought forth challenges and in some cases harder work⁵. In this sense the ability to break away from work after work hours has become increasingly more difficult.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce saw an overhaul of traditional work systems during the transition to remote work. Although not a universally shared sentiment, an overwhelming amount of workers found relief in the opportunities offered to them such as the ability to avoid interrupted sleep schedules, getting ready and commuting to work, instead opting to embrace the simple pleasures of sleeping in with a short walk in casual-dress to their living room to begin their work day⁶. This change proved relatively sustainable as a new workplace practice throughout the pandemic; for those not facing accessibility barriers (such as lack of resources for equipment of funding a work-from-home setup); however come the end of 2021 a call back to in-person work was demanded by employers with pleas from workers to maintain a hybrid model of work for as long as possible⁷.

The mass adoption of these new work systems were brought on by just that: COVID-19. A pandemic. Most employers were begrudgingly pushed to shift to these new systems and in the process, relinquishing some power held over their employees in terms of the ability to alter their schedules, deadlines and workload on a whim. As such, during this call back to the office in 2021, employers would be able to once again regain control over their employees. Through this, the demands from employees for more sustainable long-term working conditions after isolation and the realization of the alternative, positive working conditions offered by hybrid and remote styles, sparked conflict with employers who commanded workers back in office in order to garner more control, with the pushback, however, employers became

³ Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, “Let Me Work From Home, or I Will Find Another Job.”

⁴ Steed et al., “Leaving Work at Work: A Meta-Analysis on Employee Recovery From Work.”

⁵ Bunting, *Willing Slaves*, XV.

⁶ Barrero, Bloom, and Davis.

⁷ Barrero, Bloom, and Davis.

creative by using the accommodations of remote work against workers such as invading on the leisure time of employees by expecting them to be available at any time as there was no longer the excuse of not being able to execute work due to not being in office, as well as micro-managing through surveillance tactics, such as mouse and keyboard activity to show an online status during work hours, long and necessary bathroom breaks be damned⁸.

The collective exhaustion brought on by strenuous world events and the aftermath of these drastic workplace changes manifested as Quiet Quitting, which refers to the phenomena of workers leaving their jobs with little notice and in some cases no other employment lined up after their departure. Quiet Quitting describes behaviours exhibited by workers to no longer go above and beyond for employers and instead opt to silently do exactly what is required of them within the strict time frame of their working hours while rejecting “offers” of overtime work and taking on extra work⁹. The relationships between employee and employer can often be a strenuous one as the systems put in place over time have prioritized power dynamics within the workplace, often yielding a negative experience through various jobs.

One representative for this type of employee rebellion, Laura Whaley (aka Loe Whaley, online), works as an IT-Consultant who advocates for better mental health procedures in the workplace through her online social media skits. Whaley can be seen on her [TikTok](#) or [YouTube](#) accounts posting reels of fictional scenarios with characters surrounding the workplace environment and the relationships between different types of employees and working styles. Most notably, her content covers topics such as the impact of personal life stressors on the ability to contribute in a meaningful way during work hours and how that can be accommodated by employers, unique Human Resources situations dealing with harassment and boundaries, and ways to professionally express oneself. The latter offers real advice to employees who find it hard to navigate conversations within the workplace. For example, in a recent YouTube Short, she asks her colleague to offer an alternative way to phrase “I’m not doing your job for you” when responding to a coworker to which she is suggested “I’m here to support where needed however, this task falls within your responsibility”¹⁰. Through Whaley we see examples of how beyond the time-frame of a shift, time management within the workplace can be impacted by co-workers and deadlines, both with an overarching element, employer expectation and delegation of time in the workplace.

⁸ Barrero, Bloom, and Davis.

⁹ Formica and Sfodera, “The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting Paradigm Shifts: An Overview of Current Situation and Future Research Directions.”

¹⁰ Whaley, “Does This Mean He’s Officially a Fan of the Word?”

1.2 THE THRESHOLD OF WORKPLACE SPACE & TIME

“The rise of temporal architecture elevates the cultural significance of waiting from the dead time of doing nothing to a time of self-improvement and a privileged moment of reprieve. Everyone manages time in one way or the other, for better or for worse. But for most populations, the management of time is more or less internal or at least invisible - hidden from the view of others. ”

- Sharma, 2014

The passage of time can often be blurry. Liminality is a term that describes the state of being in a limbo, in-between a transition from point A to point B. The workplace is unique in this aspect as it can be interpreted as both a liminal space and a state of being (referred to as a liminoid¹¹) for employees. For example, leaving home (personal time) to attend work (transitional time) and back home (leisure time), create different liminal states of being and are accompanied by a liminal space¹². A common sentiment within shift work is that time can simultaneously feel as though it is moving quickly and also not at all, this is also dependent on the type of workplace and the nature of the work that creates the difference between experiencing a long or short workday¹³.

My wrist-watch is always set 5 minutes earlier than the established “correct” Greenwich to Eastern-Standard Time Zone interpretation as I prefer to be consistently punctual. I can choose to go against the “actual time” by creating my own management of it. I may be just on time by looking at my wrist-watch but in fact I am likely early, making my perception of time reliable but incorrect in comparison to the time on universally used clocks; aside from clocks however, time is a difficult concept to measure. Due to this, employees may experience feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity, and discombobulation as they navigate the shifting landscape of their work environment with impacting factors such as leadership transitions, staff turnover, new work assignments, reorganization, and perpetual short-staffing that may require extra attention and care in order to prevent conflicts¹⁴. Although this is applicable to many fields of work, the relationship between what type of role an employee has and time may differ; more conventional jobs within the 9-5 desk-job structures such as clerical or administration jobs may experience time slower, whereas those in fast-paced environments such as retail or design are often kept on their toes as roles often ask a degree of adaptability and flexibility from workers, creating time experiences that flash by¹⁵.

With the integration of technology, especially in the aforementioned new work systems of remote and hybrid work, working from home for most of the work week to then having a sudden need to appear in the office has impacted the perception of employee time in several ways. On a positive note, workers may enjoy the flexibility of being able to work from home for most of the week and accommodate personal affairs and errands while also being able to have the interpersonal interactions with

¹¹ Turner, Victor. "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology."

¹² Shortt, "Liminality, Space and the Importance of 'Transitory Dwelling Places' at Work."

¹³ Flaherty, A Watched Pot: How We Experience Time.

¹⁴ Daskalaki and Simosi, "Unemployment as a Liminoid Phenomenon: Identity Trajectories in Times of Crisis."

¹⁵ Sharma, In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics.

co-workers and access to external equipment/assets in person, providing them with a sense of utilizing their time within a day to their fullest capacity.

However, the negatives of this may be demonstrated in the inability to separate work time from personal time, leaving employees to working overtime without realizing or being required to do so out of coercion (masked by the guise of employee flexibility and loyalty¹⁶). For example, that one manager who asked you to do something two-minutes before your remote shift ended, leaving you without a convincing reason as to why, being on your computer already, you can't get it done; thusly leaving your precious time vulnerable yet again to exploitation because of the availability of work setups via technology¹⁷. It may be important to note that the issue surrounding imposed extra work has always been present, however it has been magnified and compounded by the pervasiveness of remote online work practices throughout the pandemic.

In addition to this, employees who are members of marginalized communities, including but not limited to, LGBTQ+¹⁸, disabled¹⁹, care-givers²⁰ and people of color²¹ may face further exploitation of their time. This can include cases of implicit biases, societal prejudices, and systemic inequalities. Due to instances of bias, prejudice, denial of accommodations, etc., marginalized employees may be excluded from opportunities ranging from social events, professional development and promotions. This would ultimately affect potential career advancements and create a sense of isolation within the workplace. In this way, the time of marginalized employees may be further impacted outside of the aforementioned power dynamics and control tactics already commonly found within the workplace²². For example, an employee with childcare responsibilities may face barriers in regards to being on time to pick up a child from school/daycare due to continuous overtime work that prevents the employee from leaving on time. Alternatively with this example, affordances of proper time off to medically recover from having a child or caring for a new child may be short.

Parallels to fiction are central to this thesis as there is no shortage of media depicting the contemporary social phenomena around the workplace. For example, in the 2022 thriller television series, *Severance*, set in the fictional workplace of Lumon Industries, employees who opt-in to the 'Severance' program undergo a medical procedure that separates the consciousness of employees between their life at work and their external life²³. The show critiques the ways in which time is manipulated in the workplace as the state of being for the workers is metaphysically separated, leaving one consciousness in a happily nostalgic experiential state and the other that remains available for exploitation at Lumon Industries. Throughout the series we see the effects on employees as we are shown their life experience

¹⁶ Waqas et al., "Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction and Its Impact on Job Loyalty."

¹⁷ Barrero, Bloom, and Davis, "Let Me Work From Home, or I Will Find Another Job."

¹⁸ Reece-Nguyen, Afonso, and Vinson, "Burnout, Mental Health, and Workplace Discrimination in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual Anesthesiologists."

¹⁹ Draper, Reid, and McMahon, "Workplace Discrimination and the Perception of Disability."

²⁰ Zuo and Tang, "Breadwinner Status and Gender Ideologies of Men and Women Regarding Family Roles."

²¹ Offermann et al., "See No Evil: Color Blindness and Perceptions of Subtle Racial Discrimination in the Workplace."

²² Short and Wilton, Talking about Structural Inequalities in Everyday Life: New Politics of Race in Groups, Organizations and Social Systems, Ch.3.

²³ Stiller and McArdle, "Severance."

through non-linear storytelling via a television show to highlight how their pasts have shaped their present and their new relationship to time while drawing a literal parallel between exploitation of a worker's time by completely severing their cognizance in order to “balance” work and leisure life. Although *Severance* approaches the relationship employees have between time and the workplace in a more conceptual way using lived experiences, it further demonstrates the workplace as a location that is both a liminal space and liminoid state of being. Additionally, this would later inform the contrast in worldbuilding of having the project of [OVER TIME](#) simulate a physical liminal workspace as well as the narrative preserving the liminoid state of being of the main character.

1.3 THE SIDE EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE TIME

Poor working standards in the workplace, more specifically within game development, may be perpetuated by the industry's highly competitive nature in both product output and job applicants, which may lead to new and current employees settling for lesser working conditions in order to maintain their roles or be promoted²⁴. Game development requires and relies heavily on collaboration and the ability to entrust co-workers and teams with executing the necessary work needed for another team to complete their project responsibilities; this may lead to workers of various teams working overtime to complete elements in time for an approaching deadline, however, a societal concept known as Crunch Culture, sees the pressure of society and the workplace on shaming those who are not seen as "productive enough" in the eyes of the media as well as certain employers²⁵. This often places unrealistic expectations on workers to adapt in short timeframes on short notice, damaging their mental and physical health in order to appease the standards expected of them²⁶.

This adoption of Crunch Culture and the pressure to perform from workers has led to another similar phenomenon referred to as Hurry Sickness. Unlike the societal concept of the crunch, Hurry Sickness is defined as the ongoing, unrelenting need to accomplish more in less time. Coined by Meyer Friedman, this sickness psychologically affects mainly those who exhibit the need to over achieve (defined as a Type A-Personality) by increasing the feelings of anxiety and unrest through a debilitating sense of urgency. As a result, these high stress levels may cause symptoms such as irritability, jitteriness, fatigue and may lead to greater health problems in relation to the heart, such as hypertension²⁷. In Dami Lee's [YouTube worklog](#) of her architectural thesis [Library of The Mind](#), she asserts that "Time has become the benefactor that affords us the opportunity to do something, we have become enslaved to time where even the most personal of concepts, such as leisure, have become commodified" (Lee, 2022)²⁸. Lee's thesis directly refers to the physicality of labyrinths and mazes as a means of physically slowing individuals down and providing an opportunity to get lost within a space. Through this she equates her conclusion of the necessity of escapism to overwork as the main impacting factor causing Hurry Sickness. As such, she asserts that there is a need for individuals (namely workers) to physically be forced into a circumstance of "being lost" to disconnect from the poorly designed worker time and their ability to escape to relax and recover.

²⁴ Edholm et al., "Crunch Time: The Reasons and Effects of Unpaid Overtime in the Games Industry."

²⁵ LaReil Anderson and Orme, "Mental Health, Illness, Crunch, and Burnout: Discourses in Video Game Culture."

²⁶ Edholm et al.

²⁷ Friedland, "Meyer Friedman, MD."

²⁸ Lee, Dami. "Hurry sickness is infiltrating our culture."

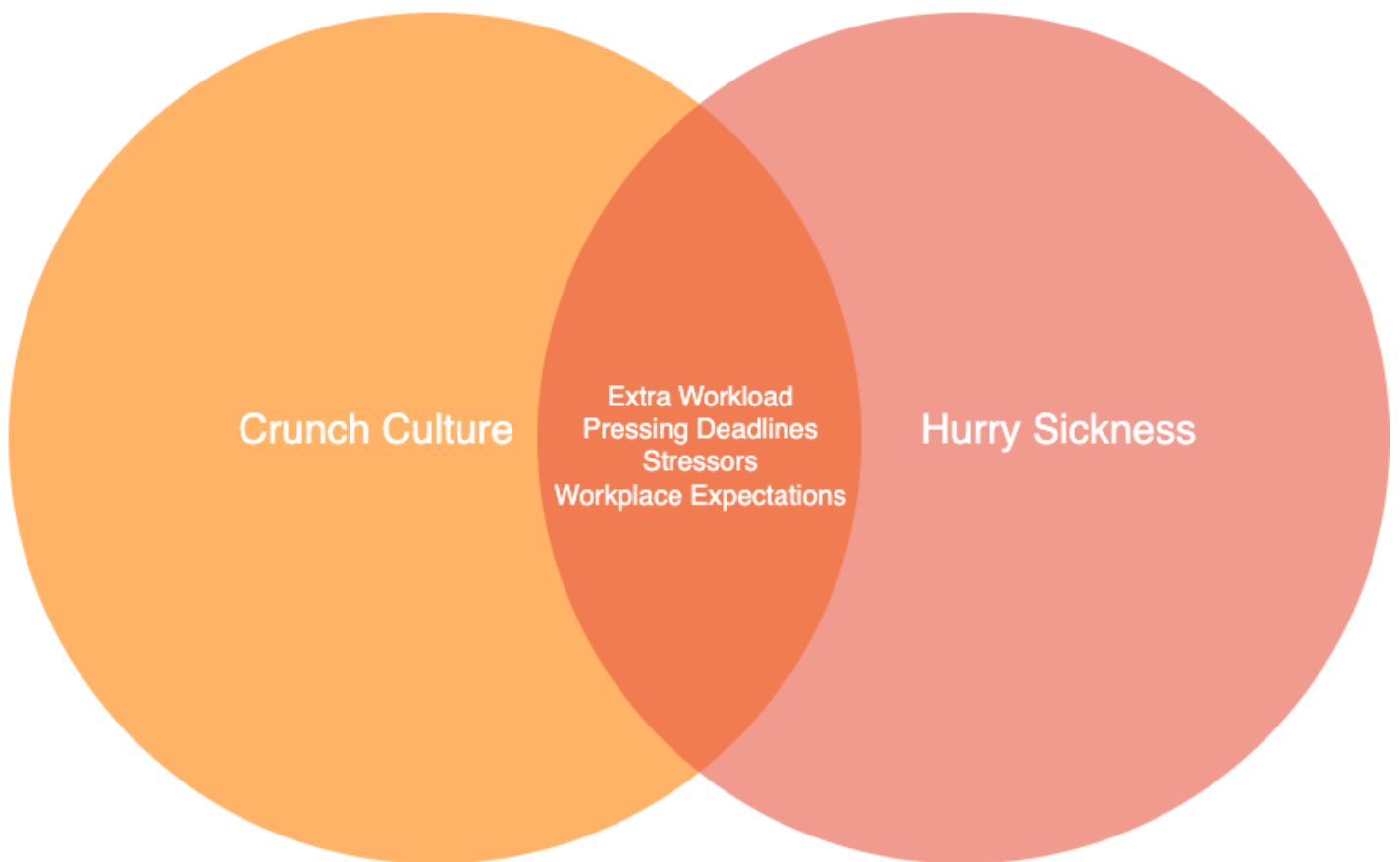


Figure 1: Correlations Between Crunch Culture and Hurry Sickness. Crunch Culture is societal expectation to excel and be productive, whereas Hurry Sickness is the side-effect of that expectation.

SECTION 2

AN EXPLORATION OF TIME

The body, once a weak and fragile entity to which the environment posed a danger, becomes potentially limitless given the right technological care. The body is no longer limited in its ability to adapt to change. Its ability to labor longer depends on assembling the right program of time control. Time is integral to this process. But it is no longer an issue of socially necessary labor time, as in Marxist critiques of time and labor. No is the issue about turnover time, as in the focus of scientific management. Instead, it is about the expansion of value into the realm of meaning making where labor is oriented around making qualitative adjustments to the problem of time. The body's labor time has no foreseeable limit.

- Sharma, 2014

Time is a finicky term to define. Try defining it without using the word “time” in the definition. I’ll wait...Not impossible, but understandably difficult. The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines time as “the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole” and “the progress of time as affecting people and things”²⁹. See, even in the second definition Oxford can’t define time without using time in the definition. Section 1 briefly reviewed the concept of time as it pertains to Western workplace culture and the relationship employees have to the time they experience as part of their daily lives. Section 2 will explore in detail the implications of how time has been designed specifically for the workplace, notably within the industry of game design, and how employees in this field use their personal time as payment. Off we go, Time Explorers!

²⁹ Oxford English Dictionary. “time, n., int., and conj.”

2.1 TIME AS A WORKPLACE STRUCTURE

Time is a crucial construct utilized by capitalism within the work environment. It directs when workers show up, how long they stay, when they leave their shifts and how they execute their duties. The capitalist use of time effectively guarantees that assets are used ideally and that ventures are finished in time for a deadline. Moreover, time usage practices can increase efficiency, decrease pressure and further develop balance between personal leisure time and work priorities³⁰, this is not always the case. The pandemic, post-pandemic and digital era has unveiled the new ways that workers have and are being exploited within the workplace. Time in the workplace is designed by corporations to maximize efficiency and productivity in favour of the profit of corporations. Capitalism is a system that prioritizes profit and output value, often at the expense of employees; this can manifest in several ways, such as long working hours, limited vacation time, and pressure to be constantly available and productive³¹. As a result, employees may struggle to find a healthy work-life balance, which can lead to burnout, stress, and other negative outcomes. Additionally, the growing trend of remote work and flexible schedules have further blurred the lines between work and personal time, making it even more difficult for employees to disconnect and recharge. In order to address this issue, companies must prioritize the well-being of their employees and provide them with the resources and support needed to maintain a healthy work-life balance³².

Time in the work environment of those within the Creative Industries; ranging from, but not limited to: arts, design, film, software and gaming development³³; can pose unique challenges. Jobs can often take on various structures such as the traditional 9-5 or even freelance gig work. The Creative Industry fields however, suffer from an instability within the workplace as the field is constantly evolving at a quicker rate than in conventional jobs and require more flexibility to meet with client demands³⁴. In this sense creatives are often vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace due to the stigma surrounding the artistic fields given the lack of recognition, limited access to resources, and subpar pay or working conditions which can create expectations from employers that may often lead to creative workers being expected to take on free work or unpaid internships in order to gain exposure and build their portfolios. This may create barriers and power imbalances where creatives are expected to sacrifice their time and efforts in skill for the benefits of others, namely corporations, without receiving adequate compensation or recognition for their work³⁵.

³⁰ Mohezar, Jaafar, and Akbar, "Creative, Happy, and Productive Workforce: How the Workplace Environment Is Changing."

³¹ Bunting, *Willing Slaves*.

³² "Let Me Work From Home, or I Will Find Another Job."

³³ "What Are the Creative Industries? - Creative Careers."

³⁴ LaReil Anderson and Orme, "Mental Health, Illness, Crunch, and Burnout: Discourses in Video Game Culture."

³⁵ Edholm et al., "Crunch Time: The Reasons and Effects of Unpaid Overtime in the Games Industry."

A hypothetical example, a worker whose main role is to video edit is approached by their employer to take on creating motion graphics on top of their editing as the software and skills are partly transferable. The worker approaches their boss and asserts that this is not within their responsibilities and would take additional time to learn, to which the employer states “it's your responsibility now” and leaves the worker to figure out how to upgrade their skills to meet the requirements. In this instance the employee is able to communicate their limitations with what fall under the responsibilities or their job description. However, it is the employer who ultimately decides how that job description evolves and with exercising that power to change requirements at any given time, leaves the employee in a precarious situation of either having to confront their resistant employer again or sacrifice their personal time to learning this new skill in order to perform their new duties.

Time is a consistent presence, yet the ever changing expectations can frequently cause instances of creative burnout and prove to be more tedious than expected. Pin-pointing the right harmony between investing sufficient energy in a venture to guarantee its quality, while likewise finishing it inside the limitations of the cutoff time, can be a fragile dance but a necessary one towards delegating one's time wisely. Creative burnout in particular is becoming increasingly problematic within industries that evidently run on creativity such as the arts and design³⁶.

³⁶ Kerrigan et al., “The Systemic Relationship between Creative Failure and Creative Success in the Creative Industries.”

2.2 TIME AS A CURRENCY

Lakoff and Johnson define metaphors as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. They argue that metaphors subconsciously shape the way we think, as such the concept of time can metaphorically be understood in a similar fashion to money³⁷. Due to its nature as a limited and valuable resource that can be saved, invested, and spent/wasted. Just like monetary currency, the amount of time one has is finite, and once it is spent, however it cannot be regained in comparison to money³⁸. Time can be used to purchase goods and services, such as paying for a therapist's hour-long session, or to invest in an activity, such as attending a concert or learning a new skill. It can also be used as a bargaining tool, as individuals may trade their time in exchange for money or other resources³⁹. For example, a person may work overtime to earn extra pay, or they may volunteer their time to support a cause they believe in. Time is a non-renewable resource, and how it is used reflects the priorities, values, and goals of the individual. As a result, it is considered a valuable currency that can have a significant impact on a person's well-being, happiness, and success. External factors such as, but not limited to, spending time at work for longer than intended can exacerbate the feeling of time being a limited resource when a large portion of one's day is consumed by a long work shift on a daily basis.

The work yielded from creatives is often highly specialized and requires considerable skill, creativity and attention to detail. Creatives often invest their time in the pursuit of further developing or learning new skills in order to hone their craft and set themselves apart from others who may be in competition with them not only when applying to jobs but also within freelance work. These investments may involve attending workshops or classes, experimenting with new techniques or tools, and seeking out feedback from colleagues, mentors and strangers. In addition to this time may also be spent building industry relationships via networking by attending conferences, industry events and maintaining a strong online presence in order to foster deeper relationships with potential clients, employers, or collaborators. Although this may be in line with workers from other fields, in particular creative work revolves around a workplace culture that implies creatives should be grateful for the opportunity of work⁴⁰. This also speaks to the sentiment of employers resistant to hiring creatives permanently or for freelance with appropriate rates as with the free or cheaper use of AI technologies such as AI Art generators or online design generators/softwares (ex. Canva, Figma, etc.)⁴¹.

³⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language.”

³⁸ Bunting, *Willing Slaves*.

³⁹ Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube, “Waiting Time and Decision Making: Is Time like Money?”

⁴⁰ Heikkinen, “Evaluating the Effects of Direct Support on the Economic Situation of Artists.”

⁴¹ Zhang et al., “A Cautionary Tale about the Impact of AI on Human Design Teams.”

As a result a large portion of leisure time is sacrificed during these pursuits, moreover, creative industry workers invest a significant amount of time to each project they take on as on top of skill set, creatives will also spend much of the initial project time carefully planning and researching often individually or in smaller teams. In this respect, creatives are often expected to adapt to new skills and be flexible in their schedules as deadlines or last minute changes may arise at random based on a change in client needs and deliverables, in some instances, employers require employees to offer their personal time in order to be available at all times. These exploitative practices are damaging to the creative industry as a whole as the lack of respect for the diligent and tireless work by its employees can lead to poor mental health and a decrease in the quality of work produced.

2.3 TIME IN THE GAME DESIGN INDUSTRY

The game design industry has established several standards for employees and creatives to ensure that games are produced with the highest level of quality possible with a primary focus on collaboration. Game development is a complex and multifaceted process as it requires the input and expertise of a range of professionals, including artists, programmers, designers, and producers. Effective collaboration between these different roles is essential to ensure that games are developed efficiently and to a high standard. The industry encourages communication and a team mentality, where every member is valued for their contributions and ideas⁴². Another important standard is creativity. The game design industry relies heavily on creative input to design, develop and implement new and innovative games. Creatives within game design need to be resourceful in order to innovate and create unique and enjoyable gaming experiences that will appeal to players and stand out from what has been done before. However the expectations of workers have been plagued by the rush to produce games under tight time frames to meet buyer and audience demands⁴³.

The standard in specific cases however, may differentiate not only due to the working conditions of any single company, but also the type of game development company. For example, Indie Game and Triple-A studios have different expectations placed upon them due to the nature and scope of their respective projects as well as resources offered to them. Indie Game developers (such as Harvester Games⁴⁴, Immudelki⁴⁵, and Innersloth⁴⁶) are typically small teams or even single individuals who work on projects with limited resources and budgets often with less rigid release dates given the “homegrown” nature of the development⁴⁷. Due to the differing expectations within timeframes (often more flexible depending on the circumstances) Indie Game development can often be comparable in quality as it allows game designers more time to develop around their schedules as opposed to rushing for a release date⁴⁸.

An example of this is Glowstick Entertainment’s *Dark Deception*⁴⁹. This indie game consists of five story chapters, each containing varying levels within them. As it stands *Dark Deception* has four of its five story chapters released with the fifth beginning production and teased in 2021. Chapter 5 was never given a fixed release date and as such two years have passed with hints that it will be released in 2023. The developers have stated through various [twitter posts](#) that they are taking their time with development. This allows them to release a product that is true to their vision in as much time as it needs while providing fans with teasers and speculations with what lies ahead in the story.

⁴² Dyer-Witheford, “‘EA Spouse’ and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, Exodus.”

⁴³ Dyer-Witheford.

⁴⁴ Michalski, Harvester Games.

⁴⁵ Foletto, Immudelki.

⁴⁶ Innersloth.

⁴⁷ Lipkin, “The Indiepocalypse: The Political-Economy of Independent Game Development Labor in Contemporary Indie Markets.”

⁴⁸ Hill-Whittall, *The Indie Game Developer Handbook*.

⁴⁹ Glowstick Entertainment, *Dark Deception*.

In contrast to this, Triple-A Studios (such as EA⁵⁰, Ubisoft⁵¹ and Blizzard⁵²) consist of large teams working on projects with much bigger budgets and longer development cycles. The expectations for Triple-A developers are typically higher in terms of production values, quality, and scope of their games. They are expected to produce games with cutting-edge graphics, advanced gameplay mechanics, and cinematic storytelling. Triple-A titles are required to meet high sales expectations in order to justify the large monetary contributions made by their publishers and investors. These developers are typically more specialized, with each member of the team focusing on specific areas such as programming, art, or sound design with the oversight of art directors and project managers⁵³.

An example of this was explored in Videogamedunkey's 2021 video "Video Game Pricing". He sympathizes with game designer's working conditions and how they have been affected by Crunch Culture. The video's main focus is on how we as consumers dictate the capitalist corporates ability to perpetuate treating their workers like production machines because we as consumers will still buy games, broken on release or not. The contrast presented by Videogamedunkey is that patching CD-ROM games was far more difficult in the past, but with the shift to the cloud storage of games, patching is easier than ever. This is great for minor bug tweaks but not at all acceptable to release a game in a broken condition because a developer can update it later. 'Dunkey goes on to explain the situation surrounding the release of *Cyberpunk 2077*⁵⁴ where the game was released in a completely unacceptable broken state for the steep price point (i.e full of glitches and errors). He concludes that this is because the developers knew it was a highly anticipated game that consumers would purchase regardless and any errors could be patched at a later date at the expense of their workers. All these issues however, were likely a result of a restrictive timeframe for workers to complete the game. There is a larger discussion to be had about the blame for this on consumers vs the market. Both are contributing factors however, 'Dunkey's video does not cover this.

This expectation to yield ambitious outputs within short time frames from game developers of all types and their creative team members alike has resulted in the aforementioned rampant rise in Crunch Culture within the workplace. Similarly, Hurry Sickness may be an ever-present phenomenon among game developers who may experience the constant urgency even outside of the workplace with the growing demand for something different from what has been seen before in gaming. The drive to continually produce new and cutting-edge games can lead to a culture of overwork, where developers are expected to work long hours and are constantly under pressure to meet tight deadlines.

⁵⁰ Hawkins, Electronic Arts.

⁵¹ Guillemot et al., Ubisoft.

⁵² Morhaime, Adham, and Pearce, Blizzard Entertainment.

⁵³ Lipkin.

⁵⁴ CD Projekt RED, *Cyberpunk 2077*.

2.4 TIME AS A GAME THEMATIC

Game design research explores a wide range of methods and research that explores the making and playing of games. In order to inform observations, disciplines such as psychology, engineering, design and art are utilized to better understand the processes that are used throughout game design⁵⁵. In even the most basic of games, gameplay mechanics (ex. point systems, character abilities, puzzles, etc.) serve as a means of unique user experience and interaction with the gameplay or story; with the overarching thematics of time across the workplace and employee leisure brings in the parallel to use time as a game mechanic to explore potential unique functions in game such as real-time events, pacing, and timed events.

A parallel to its real world counterpart, time is a crucial thematic and mechanic in many video games, serving a variety of purposes and can be applied in a myriad of ways. Timed in-game events such as racing against a clock will have players prioritizing efficiency and employing strategies to achieve their in-game goals within the time allotted. For example, *Sonic Frontiers*⁵⁶ sees players complete tasks such as racing to a goal while avoiding obstacles within tight time parameters in order to unlock new parts of the map, this gives players incentive as unlocking the map rewards players with quicker ways to navigate the space throughout the open-world which becomes crucial throughout the gameplay as more difficult timed events are discovered requiring players to fast travel between locations.

A game mechanic can be defined as a set of rules or method constructs for players to interact with⁵⁷. From a game mechanic standpoint, time provides a clear structure for gameplay, allowing developers to create objectives and challenges with specific time constraints. This can create a sense of pressure and demand that can make the gameplay more exciting and engaging. Time can also be used to balance difficulty, as players are forced to make strategic decisions about how to allocate their limited time and resources. This can be seen in certain strategy games where players must balance short-term and long-term goals. An example of this is seen in role-playing games, such as *Pokémon Platinum*⁵⁸ or *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*⁵⁹ where the temporal frame of an in-game day can affect the availability of certain characters or quests through day-night cycles and in some cases utilizing the calendar date or time from the device being played on to dictate when these events will occur for a player be it through combat or exploration⁶⁰.

Beyond its uses as a mechanic, time can be a powerful creative thematic tool, allowing developers to tell stories, create moods, and evoke emotions. By setting games in different eras or time periods, developers can create immersive worlds and allow players to explore historical events and cultures as well as create suspense, anticipation, and surprise within a narrative⁶¹. A key example of time as a thematic

⁵⁵ Kultima, "Game Design Research."

⁵⁶ Sonic Team, *Sonic Frontiers*.

⁵⁷ Tyler, "The Beginner's Guide to Game Mechanics."

⁵⁸ Masuda and Tajiri, *Pokémon Platinum*.

⁵⁹ Square Enix, *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*.

⁶⁰ Zagal and Mateas, "Time in Video Games: A Survey and Analysis."

⁶¹ Stamenković and Jačević, "Time, Space, and Motion in Braid."

within an office setting in a videogame is *The Stanley Parable*⁶². *The Stanley Parable* is a narrative-driven videogame that explores themes of choice, free will, and the nature of reality. The game is centered around the story of Stanley, an employee, who is tasked with following an unidentified narrator's instructions on what choices to make that ultimately impact the outcome of the story with several endings.

A vital element of *The Stanley Parable* that parallels this thesis is the relationship between time and work. This game critiques the rigid constraints of time in the workplace by demonstrating the way employees are often expected to follow a predetermined set of instructions to complete duties in a specified amount of time. The voice heard throughout the game serves as an unreliable narrator to the player and comments on the ways in which employees are often controlled and confined by the expectations of employers by coercing players to follow its suggestions without resistance.

However, despite the rigid, linear gameplay, *The Stanley Parable* leaves players wondering what would happen if they elect to go against the narrator's suggestions. This deviation of choice reveals to players that there is the possibility to explore other areas within the game world and unlock new endings. Players are awarded a sense of agency through this realization that Stanley can, in a way, control his fate and are encouraged to continue to question the ways in which they are influenced by the expectations of others outside of the game. In relation to the thematic of time, *The Stanley Parable* emulates the flow of time during a mundane shift while blindly following orders until Stanley (in this case, the player) takes control over how they wish to explore the story world during their time on shift (i.e in game).

The 2005 Flash game *Kill Time in Office*⁶³ demonstrates a more primal usage of time in a similar metaphysical way to *The Stanley Parable* where players take on the role of an employee who has mentally checked out of their shift. Players are awarded points by completing mini games such as replying to a friend over MSN messenger, painting their nails, and taking a crucial mid-shift nap. These tasks differ in difficulty and pose three instances of time being utilized in unique ways: The mini games being timed on the boss' randomly timed appearance and completing as many tasks by the end of the work day to leave with the most amount of points possible demonstrate time being used a mechanic to drive player motivation, however, the final example is in the duality of time being used thematically in the setting of a workplace (i.e x amount of time left in a shift to signify the end of the gameplay)⁶⁴ and the potential irony of players finding this game at school or work to pass the time themselves⁶⁵. As they say, "life imitates art". Through design methodologies, the project of OVER TIME explores the thematic of time in a similar fashion.

⁶² Wreden and Pugh, *The Stanley Parable*.

⁶³ Lau, *Kill Time In Office*.

⁶⁴ Hanson, *Game Time: Understanding Temporality in Video Games*.

⁶⁵ Jesper. *Time To Play*.

SECTION 3

METHODOLOGIES

OVER TIME employs two specific design methodologies to research and explore the use of time and its relation to the workplace settings through game design. Additionally, these methodologies rationalize explicit design choices seen throughout the finalized project's testing, drafts, and outcomes.

3.1 RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN

Research through Design (RtD) is a design methodology that utilizes the process of designing as a means of conducting research. By researching through the process of designing, designers can explore new ideas, insights, and create inventive solutions to complex problems in a variety of applications. The approach may be particularly useful in fields surrounding human-computer interaction. Through using human-computer interactions for gaming, game design teams are often faced with complex design problems that require creative solutions and collaboration for elements such as immersion, controls, etc. As opposed to treating design and research as separate processes, designers can actively engage in research activities throughout the design process through these interactions to inform their work⁶⁶. This may include conducting interviews with users, prototypes, data analysis and testing; by pursuing research in this way, designers gain a deeper understanding of the problem they are trying to solve through design and how these findings can be translated to inform their research⁶⁷.

I approached the starting stages of development with OVER TIME through trial and error. I had begun with a previous idea/iteration and experimented with several media, game engines and narrative structures in order to narrow what was the most feasible given the scope of the project. Once deciding on a concept I leaned towards researching through the process of re-designing through playtesting and iteration⁶⁸.

Iterative Design can be seen as a part of RtD that involves conducting several sessions of prototyping, testing, and refining a design until it meets the desired outcome. The approach is widely used in many fields of design, including product design, software development, and video game development. By creating new iterations of a design, designers can gather feedback to better identify errors and make improvements with each iteration until completion. The iterative design process involves several phases in which designers will identify a problem and create initial designs, sketches, maquettes and the like in order to create a working prototype for users to test. Based on the feedback provided during testing sessions, designers will repeat this process until a final design is realized⁶⁹.

OVER TIME consisted of 5 iterations each of varying completion:

- An original concept that was later recycled
- An unintentional sequel that was created before it
- An Alpha version
- A Beta version
- A final realized iteration

⁶⁶ Lankoski and Holopainen, *Game Design Research: An Introduction to Theory & Practice*

⁶⁷ Gaver, "What Should We Expect from Research through Design?"

⁶⁸ Edelson, "Design Research: What We Learn When We Engage in Design."

⁶⁹ Viudes-Carbonell et al., "Towards an Iterative Design for Serious Games."

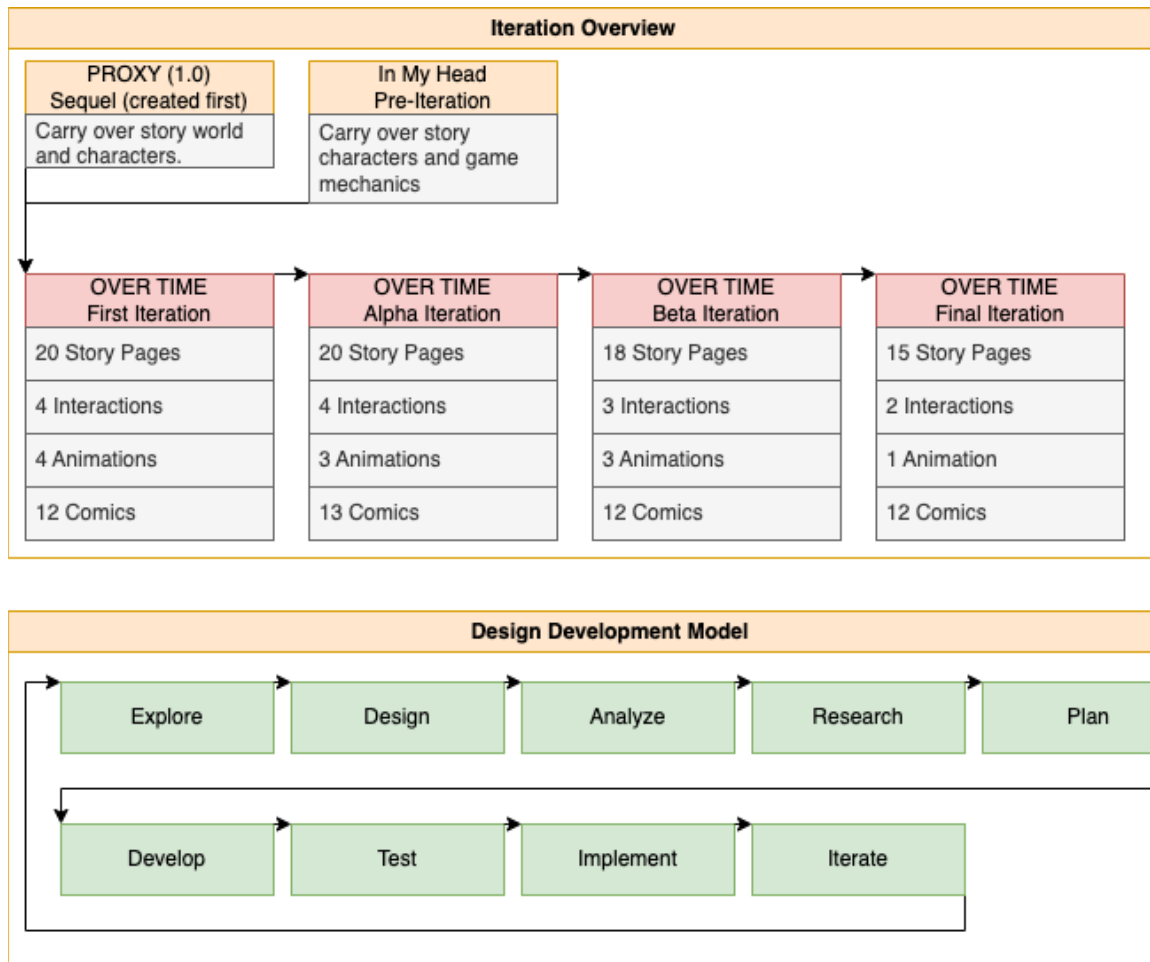


Figure 2: Iteration Overview and the Design Development Model. Through the different stages of iteration the scope was adjusted and elements of the story were removed or shifted around based on the agile model used within and after testing sessions.

OVER TIME utilized a design development model consisting of a rapid design cycle of exploring, planning, creating, testing and refining⁷⁰. Through this research method and exploring the failures of what didn't work or needed to be changed throughout iterations, I was able to narrow down my findings to better connect my research to my design applications as well as refine the overall experience and explore further narrative concepts that called into question my overarching research question of what the relationships of time and the workplace are.

⁷⁰ Matthew, Lomas, Armoutis & Maropoulos. Foundations of an agile design methodology.

3.2 CRITICAL DESIGN

Critical Design is a design methodology that focuses on exploring and critiquing social, cultural, and political issues through design. The approach involves using design as a means of asking questions in order to confront assumptions and stimulate new discourse around specific topics of interest. Critical designers tend to create provocative and occasionally controversial designs that are intended to raise awareness and in some cases use shock tactics to promote discussion about important issues via applications of new technologies or commentaries through design. This methodology is intended to provoke thought and encourage consideration for potential future prospects and social change⁷¹.

The narrative of OVER TIME comments on the current workplace practices and what lengths employees go towards in order to complete their work or garner the recognition and growth they sought from their jobs. The narrative explores the ways in which corporations maintain hidden agendas and combats the idea that workers should be subservient through a major confrontation between the main character and their employers. The storyworld, told from the perspective of the main character during a shift at work is critical through its narrative reflecting that of the real world through a slightly more fantastical lens⁷². The story depicts this character asserting themselves to their boss only to be shot down and the displays the aftermath of this confrontation, setting up the climax of the story.

Throughout the entire design process I found myself in a perpetual state of existential dread as I critiqued the concepts of time and the workplace myself to better inform the character's inner-turmoil. Ironically, the thing I struggled with most was the looming thought that I was creating a thesis about time, defining said time, all while using most if not all my personal time towards the pursuit of this thesis that I was also running out of time to complete given the accommodation of an unstable job situation causing time management-issues within my work-life balance.

⁷¹ Johannessen, Keitsch, and Pettersen, "Speculative and Critical Design — Features, Methods, and Practices."

⁷² Bardzell and Bardzell, "What Is 'Critical' about Critical Design?"

SECTION 4 OVER TIME

4.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

OVER TIME is a playable story that follows a mundane work shift in the life of Fractured Haze employee, Erik H. March, a senior reality developer responsible for overseeing the major iterations and releases of false reality experiences tailor made for clients. March, an illustration artist by trade, initially joined this company in hopes of working his way up to a more creative oriented role. One day, during a particularly long shift, an already exhausted March decides to stay overtime to complete some work in hopes of having less to worry about when he returns to his home; a setting that he feels as though he rarely returns to. Suddenly March snaps out of his haze and realizes that he has been locked in the office past close, his delirium sets in as he struggles to decide what to do next in the office and in life.

The installation portion of OVER TIME consists of an office cubicle setting that has been decorated with relevant story world documents and items to be explored and interacted with by players as this is intrinsic to player immersion within the story world. The interactive story (played via “office” desktop computer in the installation) shifted from a more traditional video game format to a mixed media experience consisting of comic story pages, animated pages, and point-and-click interactions compiled using the Game Maker game engine.



Figure 3: OVER TIME desk setup with interactive narrative via office computer.

The story-driven approach to game design manifested through the narrative and dialogue to further the critical commentary and decisions March deliberates throughout the story. I began conceptualizing the narrative through visuals and what might be said throughout certain interactions March may have, then proceeded to plan the overall narrative flow through the story pages to get an idea of what needed to be discussed where and when within the story. This continued to evolve over the course of development and playtesting as certain elements were cut from the story for time and contingency sake. The mixed media format served several key functions to the experience, the usage of different forms of media allowed me to create unique instances of simulated time as each form was dependent on the play-style of the individual. For example, players may spend as much time as they need or want during the comic pages and interactive pages but prompt different executions (i.e reading or interacting) to give them a unique sense of pacing, however the animation pages serve as a fixed time transition to continue the narrative along.

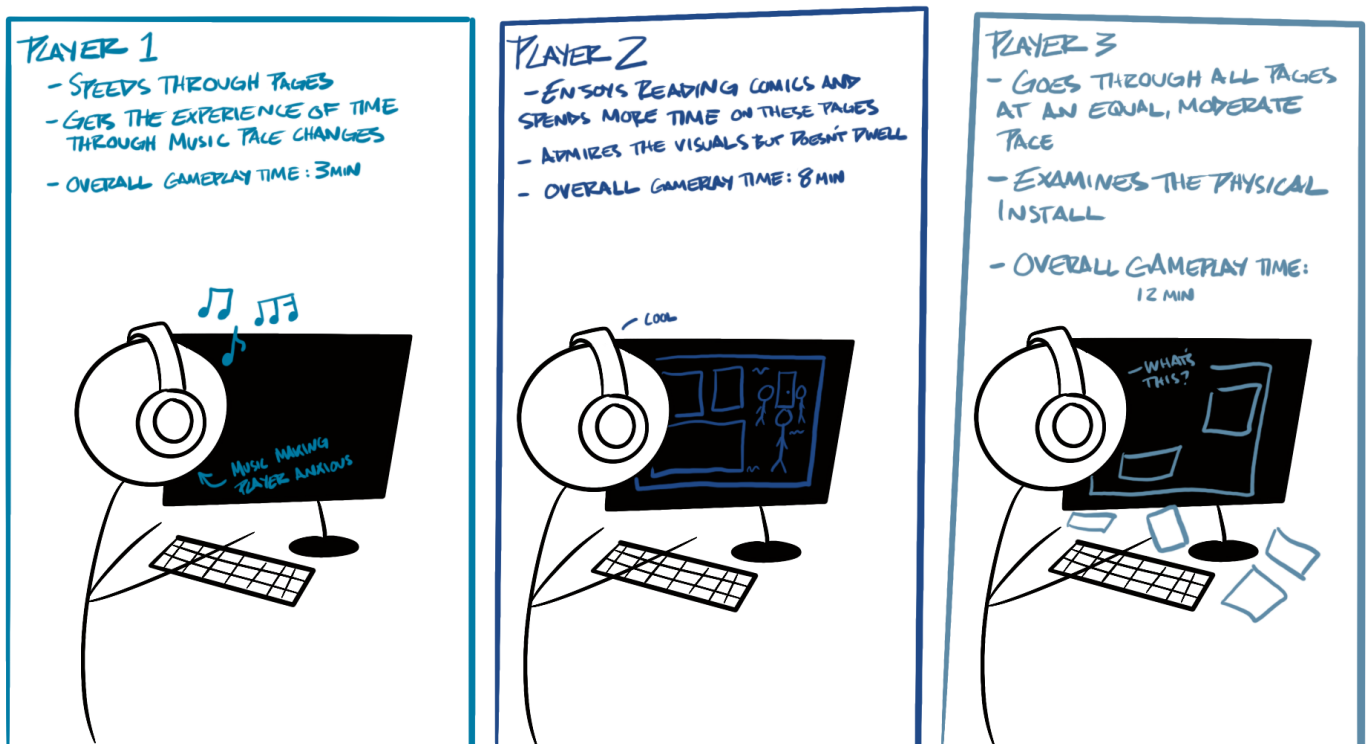


Figure 4: An example of the types of interactions players may have that change the amount of time spent with the project. Player 1 may breeze through the entire story but get a sense of rush from the music. Player 2 may enjoy the visuals but doesn't dwell on any one page over another. Player 3 may spend equal amounts of time on each page as well as explore the physical install more.

OVER TIME serves as a loose prequel to my 2019 undergraduate thesis, PROXY (1.0) (see [Appendix B](#)). The story of PROXY (1.0) is not intrinsic to understanding OVER TIME, however it serves as the reference material for the prequel aspects such as the main character, the setting and how and why the events of PROXY (1.0) came to be. PROXY (1.0) however was solely a design project with no academic research attached. Although similar thematics exist between both projects, the narrative and research of OVER TIME differs from PROXY (1.0) as it focuses on Erik H. March and his personal struggles between his workplace, his artistic self-expression and his perception of time management; in contrast to this PROXY (1.0) focuses on the aftermath of March's departure from Fractured Haze with the primary conflict being the rebellion and destruction of sensitive computer files at the hands of March's illegal PROXY, Ulrich Dex Hexen.

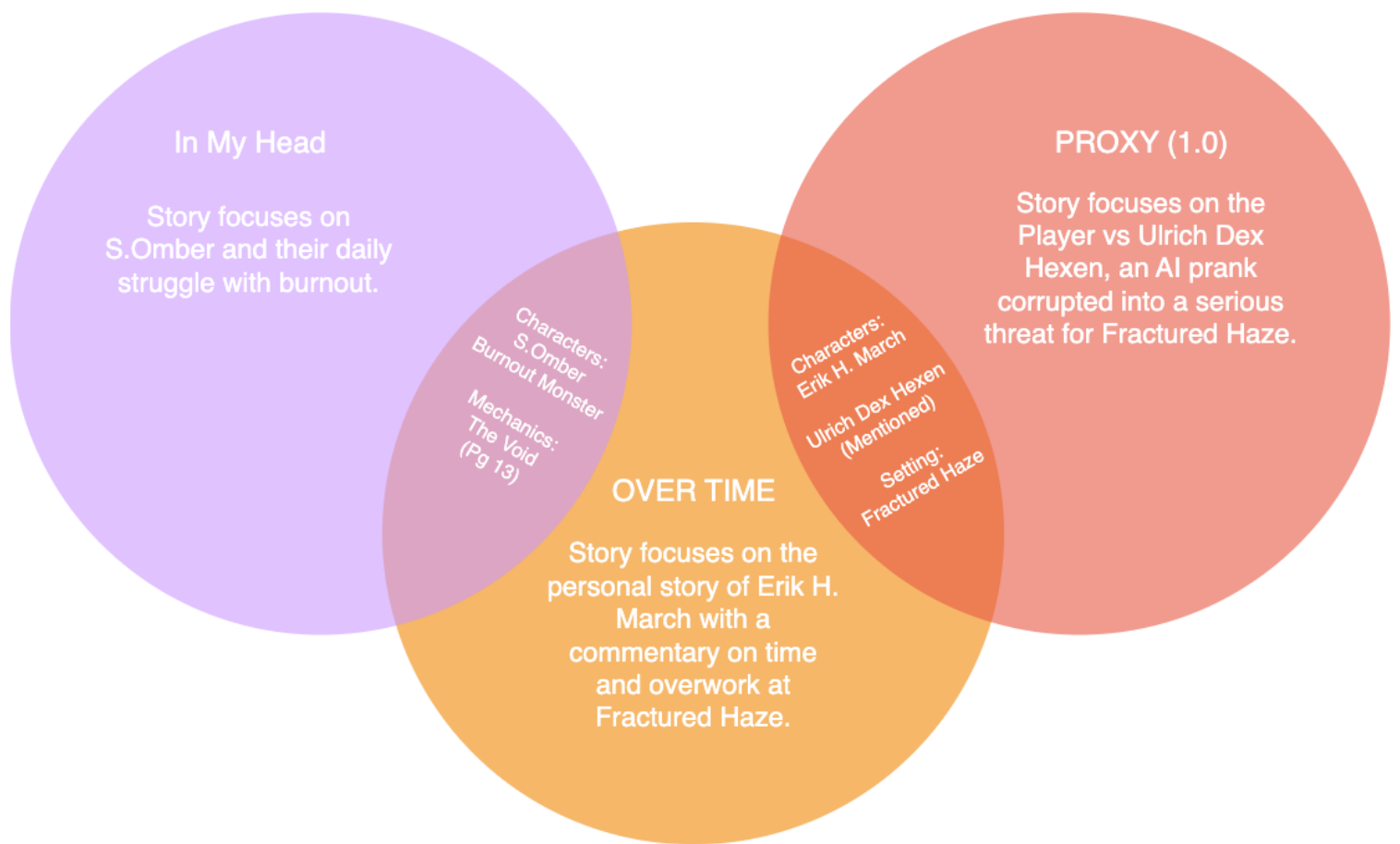


Figure 5: Story Overlaps between versions.

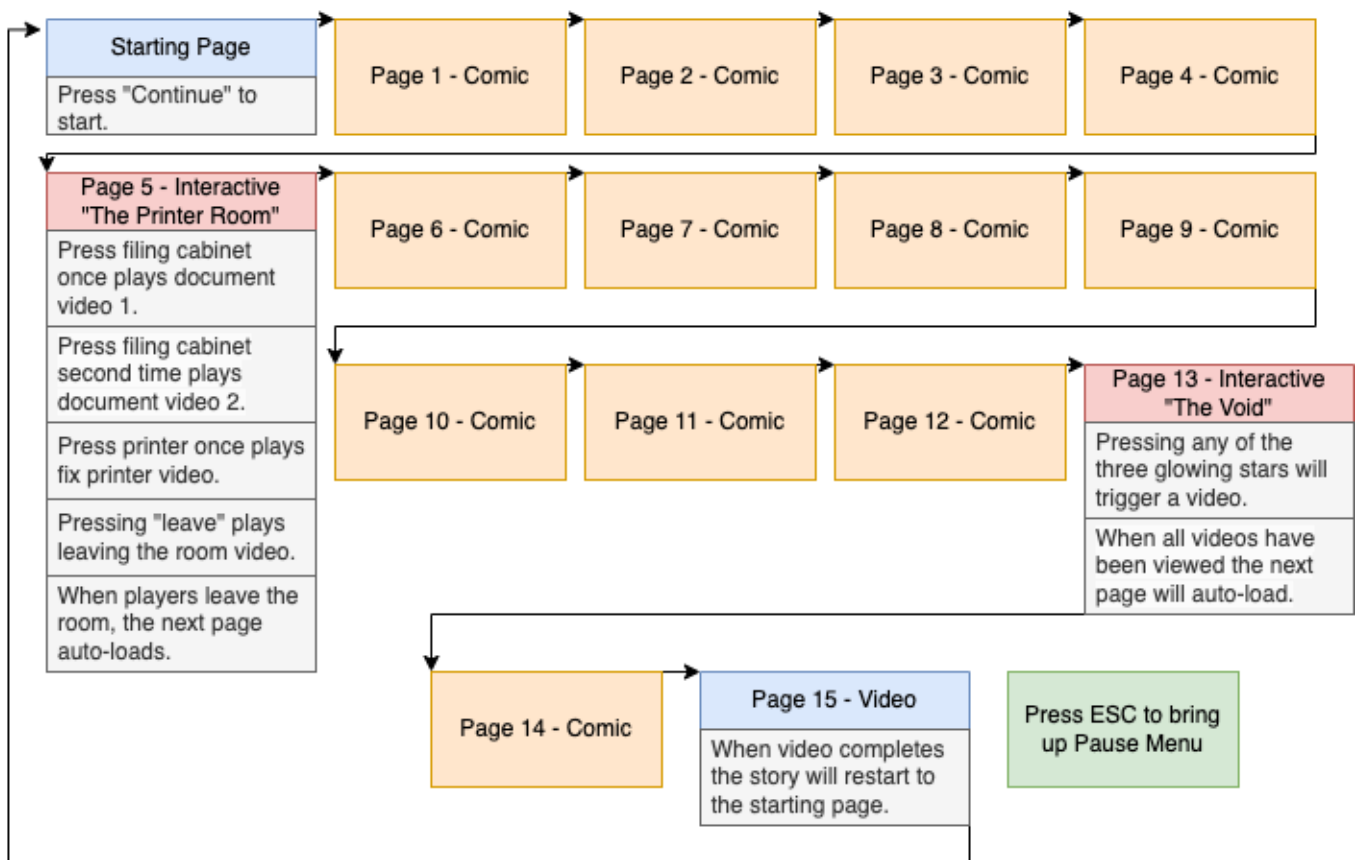


Figure 6: Gameplay Structure of OVER TIME.

4.2 ITERATIONS

IN MY HEAD



Figure 7: In My Head Key Visual.

During the initial stages of brainstorming (see [Appendix C](#)), OVER TIME manifested as an entirely separate idea titled In My Head. During the development of In My Head, the concepts surrounding time, burnout, and self-expression presented themselves in a more literal sense with the main character being a cartoonish vaguely humanoid figure (the player) accompanied by a monster (burnout) and a journal (self-expression). The story was set in the home of the main character, S. Omber, after having suffered through an episode of emotional strife, Omber seeks help in the form of a journal/diary suggested to them by their therapist to ward off the intrusive thoughts and feelings brought on by the burnout monster that lives inside of their head. Players would have to spend an entire day inside the house of Omber completing minor daily tasks that, although mundane in nature, may be difficult for those experiencing anxiety and depression, whilst journalling throughout their day.

Players would be prompted with completing 5 tasks, each with a win or lose condition; should players “win” 3/5 of the tasks they would receive the “good” ending where Omber journals at the end of the night feeling optimistic for the day ahead, however if 3/5 of the tasks are “lost” players would receive the “bad” ending where Omber has been overtaken by the strength of the burnout monster and sinks deeper into their struggles.

Initially this first iteration was heavily influenced by my own personal lens as a worker and practitioner of the creative industry fields (namely technoetic arts and new media through game development) and became a means of my own catharsis and self-expression of my own struggle with burnout through my practice during early stages of development. An example of this was the usage of personal preferences within levels (ex. Shower temperature, see [Appendix C](#)) as well as how I personally viewed what the manifestation of *my* burnout would look like. The main inspiration was the concept of change taking place over time not overnight where on any given playthrough there could be either of the two outcomes depending on the players choices. During several sessions of casual feedback, it became clear that players/peers found many instances of resistance towards the narrative, more specifically, the interactions offered by the narrative that pulled them out of the immersion. This was due to the fact that the in game “tasks” and experiences were more autoethnographic in nature to myself and leaned towards a more Fine Art perspective than a Design outlook as there was hesitation on my end to change the parameters of certain portions of gameplay due to my own bias as well as changes I did agree with being out of my scope given my abilities and the time available to me. This resulted in the shift to the current iteration, OVER TIME.

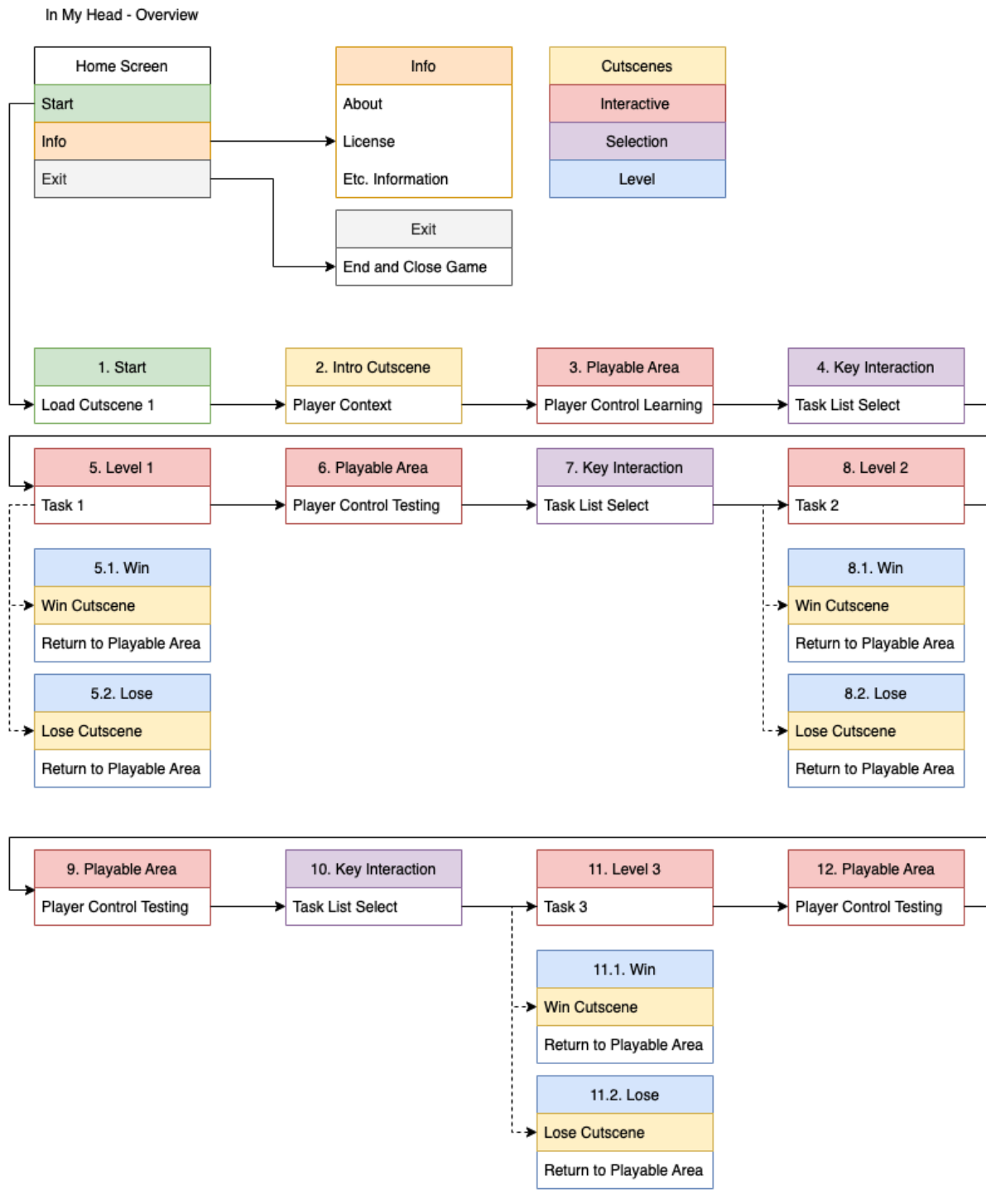


Figure 8: In My Head Overview Pt.1

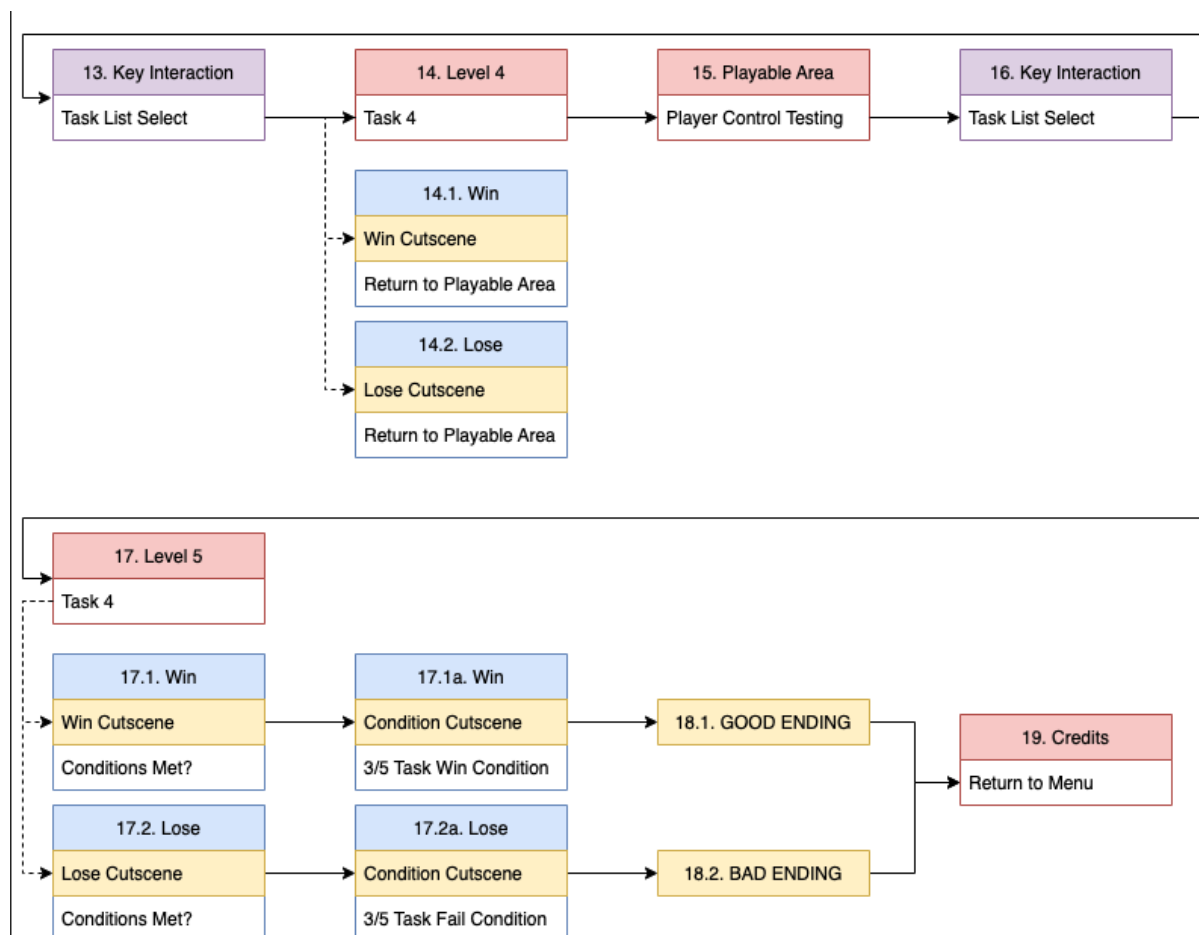


Figure 9: In My Head Overview Pt.2

OVER TIME



Figure 10: OVER TIME Key Visual.

OVER TIME is the final iteration of this project's concept, however unlike In My Head where the concept was entirely original to my body of work, OVER TIME references an already established story world taken from my 2019 undergraduate thesis, PROXY (1.0). I, however, had grown attached to the character created for In My Head and in a ploy to not entirely abandon my original concept, I instead shifted the narrative to follow Erik H. March's struggles with burnout/exploitation, self-expression/creativity, and time within the context of his workplace which served to better create opportunities to explore March's personal perspective on time management and how it creates conflict between his profession and personal practice. This shift away from Omber as a vessel for the player to March as an observation for the player allowed me to keep certain preferences that are specific to the in-world character without taking away the preferences of the player.

This is most notable in the difference between interactions as, for example, In My Head's 4th task of the day for Omber consisted of them having to take a shower. Players were prompted with the shower dial to select whatever temperature of water they preferred, however the "lose" condition was set so that either extreme cold or hot within a certain range would play a cutscene exhibiting the negative outcome, the "win" condition however, being any temperature in between the extremes. My thought process with this is that a shower that is too cold would shock Omber and one that was too hot would make them lethargic and linger too long wasting the running water. This level in particular created a lot of discourse around player preference as the lose condition was based off of my own bias but was unrelatable to certain players as if they chose their preference and it happened to be within the lose threshold, it made them feel as though they were being punished for their personal preference.

This challenge was mitigated with the shift to OVER TIME as interactions were no longer meant for the players to interpret as their own as the story is told from March's perspective to himself via inner monologues for players to find and explore with the interactions serving to immerse players in the story world and March's thoughts rather than using March to assert their own preferences of choice as originally intended with Omber. The new concept for OVER TIME proved to pose less technical challenges during production as well as remove the biased nature of the tasks from In My Head and allowed me to explore a previous project in further depth as well as incorporating story elements and visuals from In My Head in such a way that my previous hard work had not gone entirely to waste during this shift.

4.3 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURE

The development of this project's concept began as a more traditional video game experience consisting of a single level with several completion requirements that yielded a "good" or "bad" ending, this iteration however was overhauled to the current concept due to plot consistency issues and personal ability constraints. Over the course of the initial planning stages, I had adopted a new concept that required me to reframe my work scope by removing any elements that posed an unrealistic challenge to my workflow given the time constraints; this consisted of narrowing complex code or usage of simpler game engines and relying more on the art direction and digital art seen throughout the story. This resulted in utilizing the final presentation style of the project to compensate for any missing elements that otherwise would have offered more depth to the story digitally. I achieved this by shifting OVER TIME to an interactive installation experience set in a replicated office space which allowed me to use the physical space and tangible items to fill in any gaps within the experience.

Due to this shift towards a mixed media approach, I was required to reassess and rework my execution plan. I had divided my work based on milestones of execution for each form of media, most of which had to be executed in tandem with one another in order to be completed within the given timeframe. Outside of physical install space and its tangible elements, the narrative consisted of 18 "story" pages: 10 comic pages, 5 animated pages, and 3 interactive pages that contained both animated and still image elements.

MILESTONE OVERVIEW

Comic Pages (Page 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

Comic story pages took on a webcomic style that required the following milestones:

- Page Drafting
- Script Drafting
- Digital Art Creation
- Lettering
- Final Transcript
- Music
- Movement (for select panels)

Animated Pages (Page 15)

Animated pages act as cutscenes to further explain the narrative through text-based videos with graphics. During feedback sessions and revisions through iterations (see [Section 4.3.2a & b](#)) many animated cutscene pages were removed due to poor reception. Page 15 however serves as a final moment within the story where players do not have control. Players will watch March's resolution as the false reality he has created and presented to players glitches out and returns them to the starting page.

- Storyboarding
- Script Drafting
- Video Editing, Subtitling & Final Transcript
- Music & SFX

Interactive Pages (Page 5, 13, 14)

The interactive pages serve as a digital form of immersion that is meant to contrast the physical interaction with the installation as well as offer a break from the interaction of the comic and animated pages that requires players to simply read or watch. The interactive pages consist of a mixture of animated and still image elements and required the following milestones:

- Storyboarding/Mapping Interactions
- Still Image Asset Creation
- Animation Storyboarding
- Animation (video or GIF)
- Script Drafting
- Subtitling & Final Transcript
- Music & SFX
- Coded Mechanics in Game Engine

Physical Installation

The physical installation space was to be executed near the end of the playable story's completion as it consisted of gathering decorations and creation of elements such as story world materials (i.e any items or workplace documents the main character would have had in his workspace) as well as furniture and technical equipment.

In order to gauge the completion of the aforementioned milestones and receive feedback, a series of playtesting sessions for an *Alpha (initial, barebones) and Beta (refined, nearly finalized) version of the digital narrative was conducted. The Alpha playtesting sessions covered feedback of the initial narrative and story flow within the game engine using placeholders or drafts, whereas the Beta playtesting sessions used near finalized assets and was meant to understand what interpretations, feelings and play-style behaviours players might exhibit during the experience.

*Alpha - Alpha Testing is a type of software testing performed to identify bugs before releasing the product to real users or to the public.

Beta - Beta Testing is performed by real users of the software application in a real environment.⁷³

⁷³ GeeksforGeeks. "Difference between Alpha and Beta Testing", Published by pp_pankaj, 2022.

4.3.1 PRE DEVELOPMENT - PLAN

Using the milestones as reference points, the pre-production plan began with an overview of what story pages needed to be grouped and executed together. The narrative had major portions completed with the story of In My Head being altered to fit the character of March and the workplace as well as PROXY (1.0) providing context for the environment and motive of March. The mixed media format however posed the unique challenge of creating issues when grouping pages together to be completed, my initial plan of action was to execute 4 pages at a time over the course of a month in order of page number (ex. [Month Week 1] Pages 1-4). This however did not end up being the case as the shift in workflow was too abrupt when changing between the different forms of media, more specifically comic or animation pages to interactive pages as they all required different setups in order to develop.

Instead, I decided to go in order of the pages that were the most narrative heavy and physically demanding to accomplish. This resulted in the comic pages being completed first as each comic page averaged approximately 2-4 hours to complete within Procreate before lettering the script into text bubbles in Adobe Photoshop but also required me to assume positions that were less than ergonomic for extended periods of time. The singular animated page of Page 15 was to be created in the same fashion as its comic page counterparts however with added video editing for effects, ultimately being the more time efficient process in the entirety of development.

Interactive pages however proved to be the most difficult as not only did they require still image and animated assets but also coded portions. During earlier stages of development between In My Head and OVER TIME, 3 different game engines were tested using trial and error to determine which was best suited to continue development. In My Head began in Unreal Engine 4 as it was the game engine I had the most experience with, however it became apparent that creating a 2D, non-side scroller game in an engine designed more so for 3D projects was not feasible in the long term life of the project during development and post release. Unity was trialed next; however, the learning curve of exploring a new engine so late into production also posed its unique set of problems although it was more in line with what needed to be executed. This led to the decision to stay within the Game Maker engine as it was more user/beginner friendly and allowed me to adjust the parameters and assets as needed with ease given the newly linear nature of the story and the shorter gameplay time. Outside of the game engine, the interactive pages utilized the same softwares in order to create assets to populate the interactive space.

4.3.2 DEVELOPMENT - CONCEPT TO REALITY

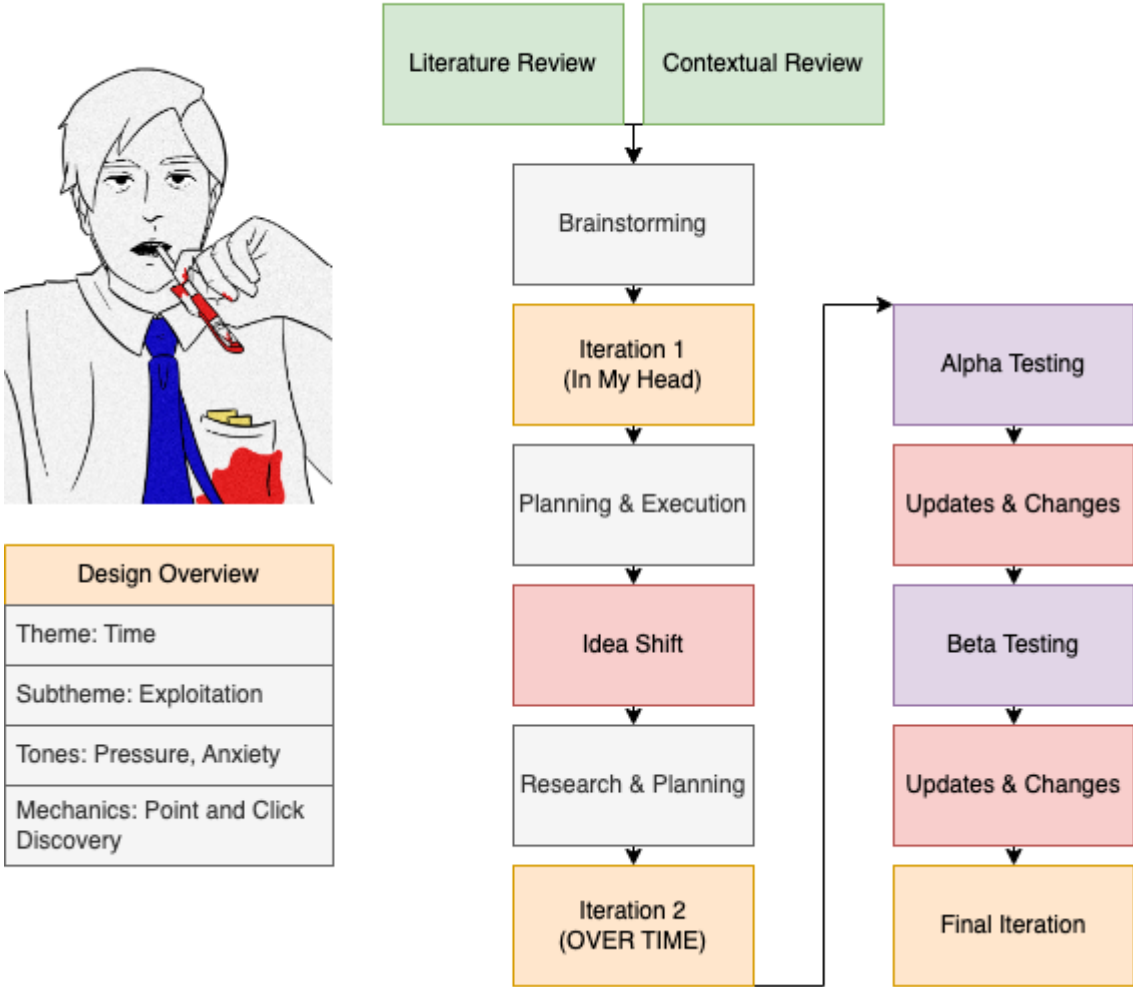


Figure 11: Design and research process overview for development.

NARRATIVE

With the original concept of In My Head being altered late into the timeframe of the project's development, it was intrinsic to my workflow that I started with flushing out the narrative to inform the art direction of the visuals and installation. This was done by creating a synopsis of the story and breaking down the major events into acts/chapters. The narrative loosely follows a 4-Act Structure:

Act 1: Another Days Work (Story Page 1-5)

Begins with introducing Fractured Haze and Erik H. March as well as setting up the character's motivation. Key Event: Learning about PROXY and March's new responsibilities.

Act 2: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back (Story Page 6-8)

March takes the steps to confront upper management about his new role and gets rejected thus setting up the character's conflict. Key Event: Returning to work and doing overtime.

Act 3: Over Time, Sooo Over Time (Story Page 9-12)

March has not only worked overtime but has literally gone over the time he should have, resulting in him being locked in the office overnight and succumbing to delirium caused from burnout and emotional exhaustion, leading to the conflict's climax. Key Event: Contemplation of Choice.

Act 4: The Day Time Stood Still, I Took a Breath (Story Page 13-15)

March has come to a resolution to his problems and can now finally rest easy despite the uncertainty of what is to come. Key Event: Story Conclusion.

In order to keep in mind the scope of completion for deadlines, the parameter of having the narrative take approximately 5 minutes to complete accommodated the potential for more players to interact with the project in a timely manner as well as give them additional time to explore the installation elements, in turn this also cut down development time with shorter animated pages and interactions. A downside to scaling back however, consisted of a potential lack of exploration or focus of other aspects of the story world such as more information on Fractured Haze as a company or the importance of the PROXY. The details of the narrative were flushed out during this stage however the dialogue and scripting was left to a page-by-page basis as flexibility was needed to fill in plot holes between the different forms of media.

It is implied in Act 4 that an indeterminate amount of time has passed. To the player it may have come across as the day following the previous events of the story or a longer period of time prior to March's resignation as in the dialogue March alludes to having created the first PROXY (i.e Ulrich Dex Hexen of PROXY (1.0) and he feels some sense of guilt for having it prank the company behind the scenes through the servers. This release of Hexen to tamper with company files post March's departure was meant to symbolize the idea of employees being treated as disposable but once they leave their department crumbles. In this sense, March lives in a world where he and his talents are entirely replaceable and therefore needs to find a way to smite Fractured Haze. Possibly not a wise decision as he will likely not

get a letter of reference when applying for another job, but surely it made him feel better.

ART DIRECTION & VISUAL STORYTELLING

My intention with the visual aesthetics of OVER TIME was to create a cartoon style of the uncanny valley where, due to March's role at Fractured Haze as a reality developer himself, was meant to imply that March created a false reality contained in a desktop application where the visuals and narrative tell his story to anyone who was willing to listen at the company past the point of his departure. As March was originally an illustration artist by trade, I felt it fitting to have his character be drawn stylistically in a mix of cartoon realism to show how he views himself as an artist/illustrator, but keep the environment mundane and realistic using altered royalty-free stock photos to create a photorealistic contrast to the otherwise stylized character and assets.

The use of sticky-notes as eye covers in March's design was shown as a means of him killing time within the office; a bored and tired March draws eyes on sticky-notes and places it atop his own to simulate being "awake". This was meant to symbolize his jaded and hazed nature of being blinded as to what to do next as well as "being on autopilot", with the stick-notes flying off his face once March came to see his resolution in Pages 12 & 13. Various papers and sticky notes March interacts with also become stylized and are used as speech bubbles for his inner monologue (see [Figure 12](#)), in contrast to this however various bookmarks, stickies and other office stationery are used throughout the pages primarily to distinguish speakers. An exception to this however, are the video sequences within interactions and the final page where subtitling is used.

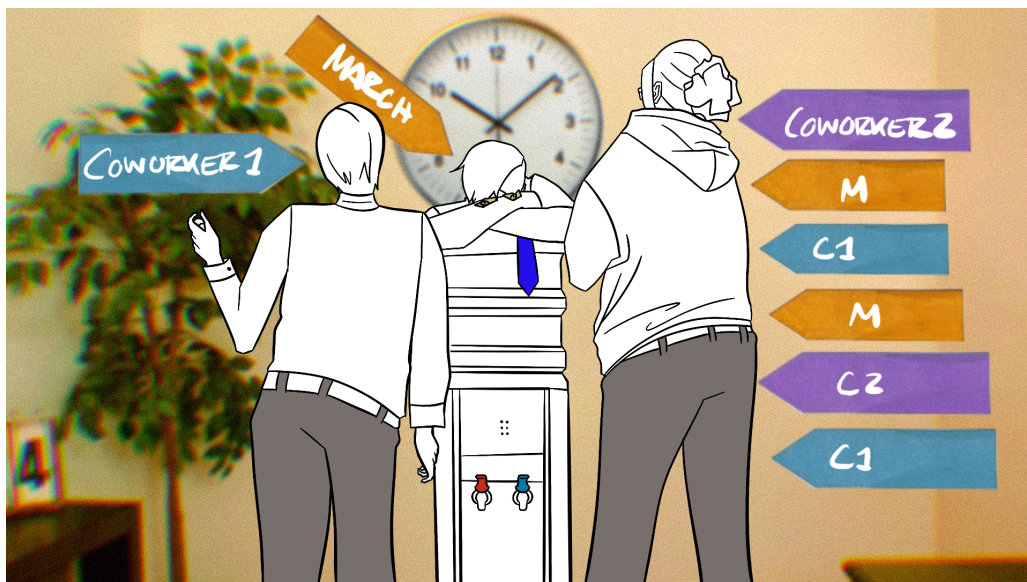


Figure 12: Page 4, example of using stationery to distinguish speakers.

The colour palette was intentionally made to be flat and oversaturated with the backgrounds being yellowed and hazy, much like being exposed to bright fluorescent lighting found in offices or common spaces for extended periods of time. In contrast to this however is the stark black and white characters with solid pops of colour for elements found on characters (ex. The pen ink spill seen on March's shirt) and the items within the spaces to be interacted with. This was done to show that the items March is interacting with, and or intended to interact with are things he is cognizant of observing through his "eyes", in comparison to the background that is constantly out of focus.

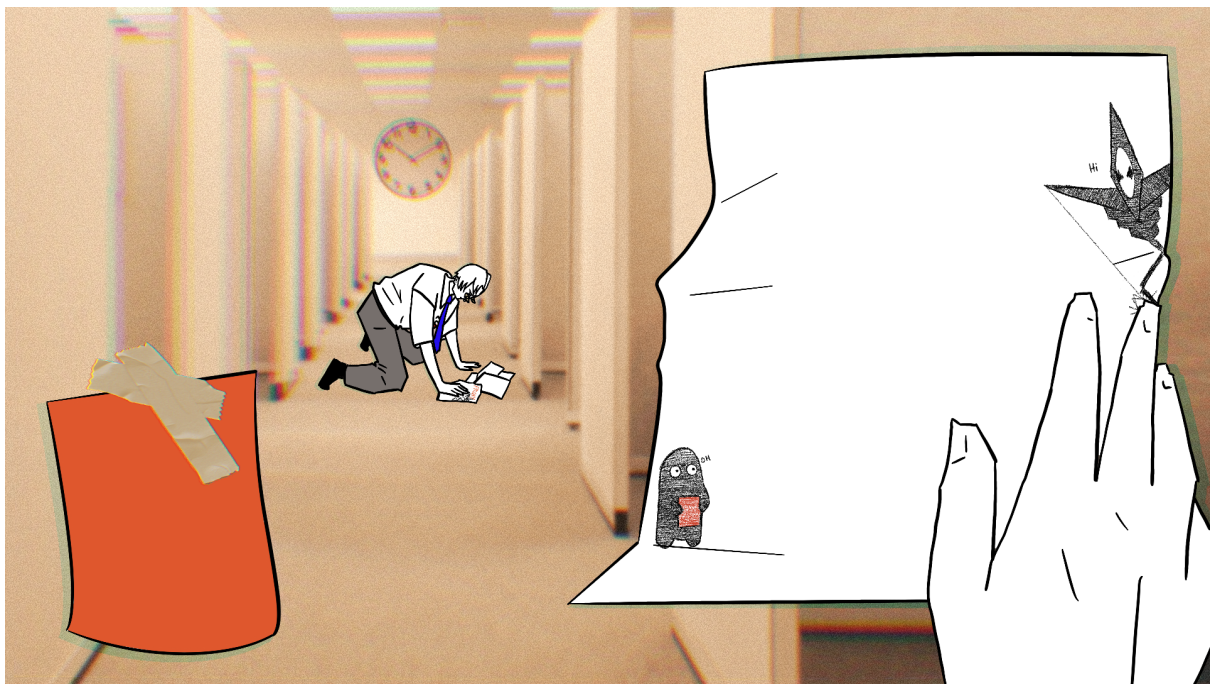


Figure 13: Page 3 demonstrates the haziness of the scenery but the stylistic nature of March and the things he interacts with. S.Omber and The Burnout Monster can be seen as doodles done by March on a work document.

In Act 3 & 4 there is a shift in aesthetic where more elements of the background remain hyper realistic but are now in focus and or are completely stylistic, this takes place after the sticky-notes on March's eyes leave his face as originally they were put on to show his tired and jaded state but he is now awakened through a revelation and therefore can see his surroundings more clearly. In Pages 6 & 7, we see March approach two members of upper management. Both are seen to have no distinguishing features of their own outside of hairstyle, neither face has eyes. This symbolizes March's perception of his upper management as never truly seeing him, much like how March is blinded by the sticky notes to a degree, his employers are completely blind to him.

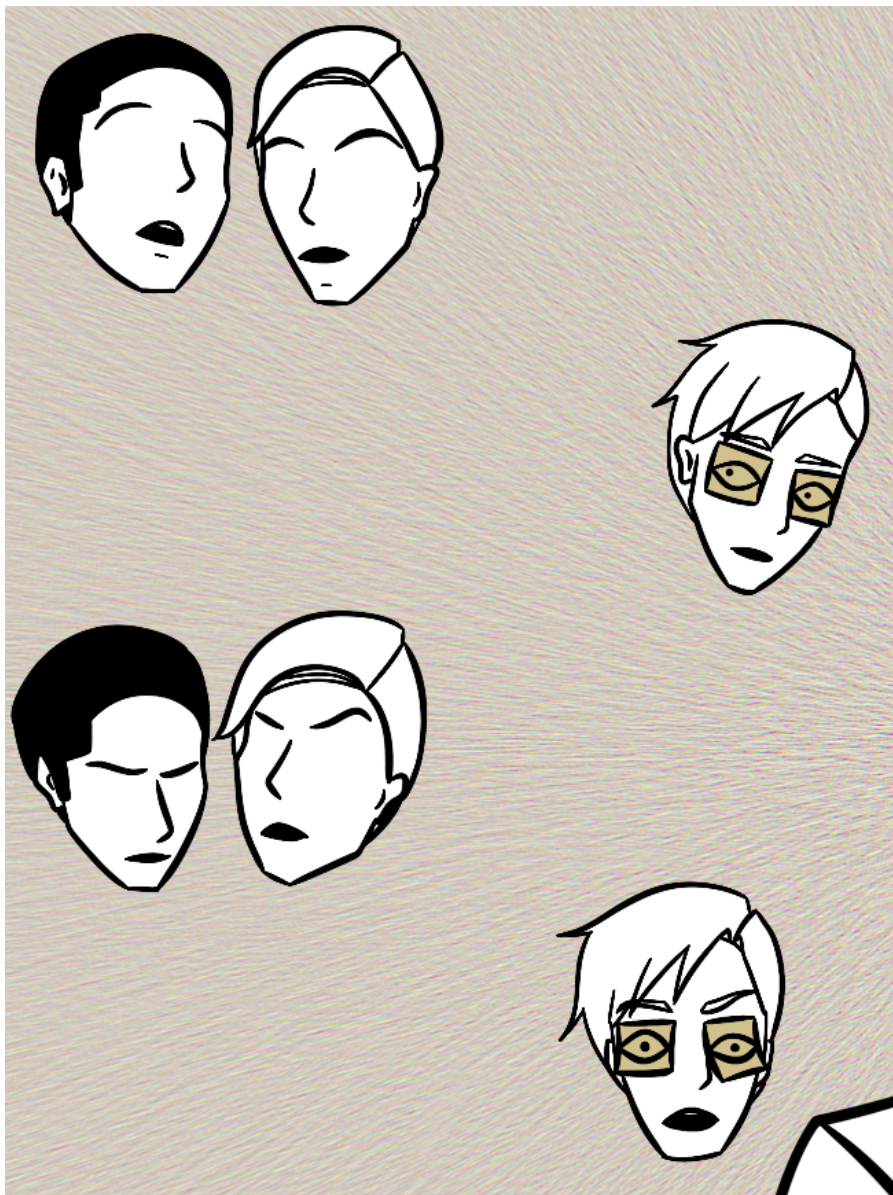


Figure 14: Page 7, March discussing his job responsibilities with upper management. March continues to be jaded as shown by the sticky notes over his eyes, however his bosses are seen with no discernible features and no eyes to symbolize them not "seeing" March's concerns.

Within Act 4, March is seen in an environment that is completely drawn. This is to symbolize that the world he now sees is entirely a reality he views for himself, as opposed to before where only things given his immediate attention, such as himself, his coworkers, or items he may be in proximity to or interacting with, were drawn in the stylized art. Although more colour has been added to the story, March remains black and white. This was intentional as I wanted to symbolize the fact that he has always been a blank canvas. This was also done to show the contrast of the newly added colour to his reality showing the new vibrancy he has found for life within his personal practice and within his mundane day-to-day activities now free of the traditional workplace.



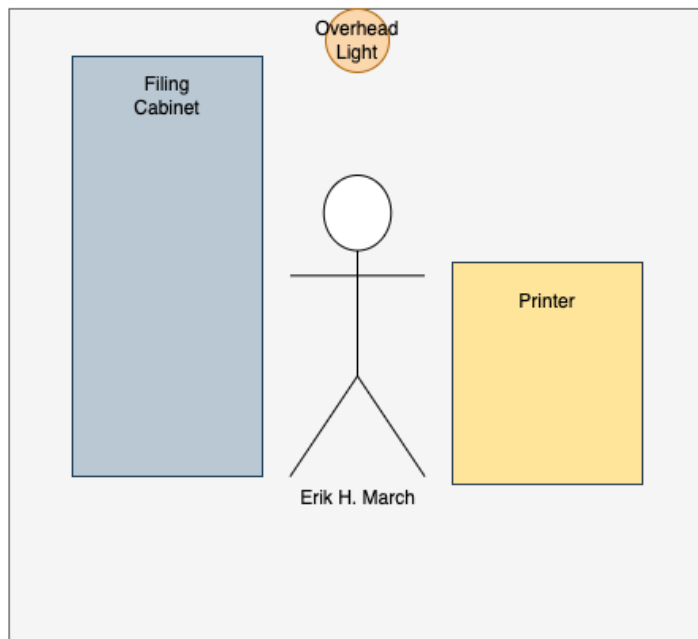
Figure 15: Page 10 vs Page 15 (part of final video). In Page 10 March is still in a predominantly hyper-realistic, washed out setting as opposed to the March seen in page 15 in a scene of vibrant colour and stylistic art.

The overall message of OVER TIME isn't that work is bad, but rather that there are things within your control however scary the process of taking that step towards control is. Act 4 demonstrates this through March's shift from internal monologue to outward dialogue directed towards the player. No longer is the story about March's struggle with wasting his time, time has, even if just for a moment, stopped for him and permitted him to change course. This is meant to make the player question their own relationship to their time and work. Was there something the player has been putting on the back-burner because they didn't have enough time? Are they too tired to enjoy the little things after work? Are they pleased with where they stand at work? And do they need to reassess their personal usage of their time?

GAMEPLAY MECHANICS

Gameplay mechanics in OVER TIME refer to the entire digital experience that can be found by players using the computer within the office space. The Game Maker engine was used to create a link between the different forms of media; the landing page was meant to simulate a computer desktop as opposed to a traditional starting screen, in this way players may click around within the space to eventually "open" the story, upon opening however Game Maker loads a video files meant to transition players out of the desktop space and being the first story page. As there are more comic pages than animated or interactive, players will use the keyboard arrow keys to toggle back and forth between the still image pages, however once they enter an animated or interactive page they will not be able to return to previous pages, likewise once an animated or interactive page is completed it will automatically load the next page. These controls are not outrightly told to the player, however to mitigate confusion a sticker on the bottom right of the computer monitor with the text "ESC = Pause" will hint to players to press the Escape key, this will bring up a pause menu that will pause the story in the background and show the full controls as well as an option to return to the story or quit. In the case that they chose to quit, the application will not shut down but rather reload the starting desktop, restarting the story for the next player.

All 3 interactive pages have the same base form of interaction using a point-and-click style of mechanic with minor variations between pages. Page 5 has players in the printer room where they can choose to click on the printer or filing cabinet in order to view short animations that lead towards setting up the conflict of the story, when players are finished they can select the option to leave the room which will show March doing just that. Page 13 shows players March floating in the void of space and time with a hyper realistic galaxy background, players are encouraged to explore the space with the computer mouse to find stars that when clicked load a short flash back from March's life, there are 3 total memories to explore, once all have been viewed players will be transitioned to the next page.



The Printer Room

The Printer Room is the first setting of interaction within OVER TIME. March is tasked with getting back to work and chooses to begin his shift with the monotonous clerical tasks. The printer in the room is seen to be on fire. In actuality it isn't but because its always broken in March's "eyes" it may as well be on fire. Clicking the filing cabinet once will load a video of March reading documents he shouldn't, clicking the cabinet will do the same however with a different document being read. Clicking the printer once will show a video of March complaining, fixing and using the printer.

Activities
Reading Files You Really Shouldn't
Fixing Printer & Make Photocopies
Leaving The Room

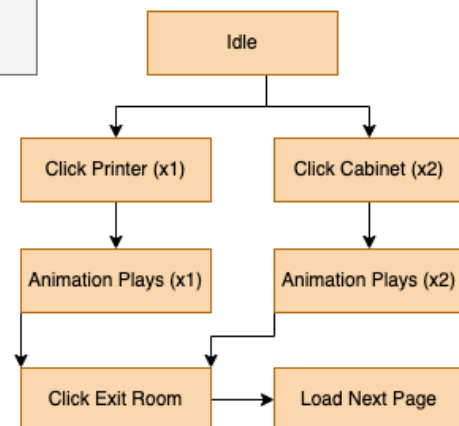
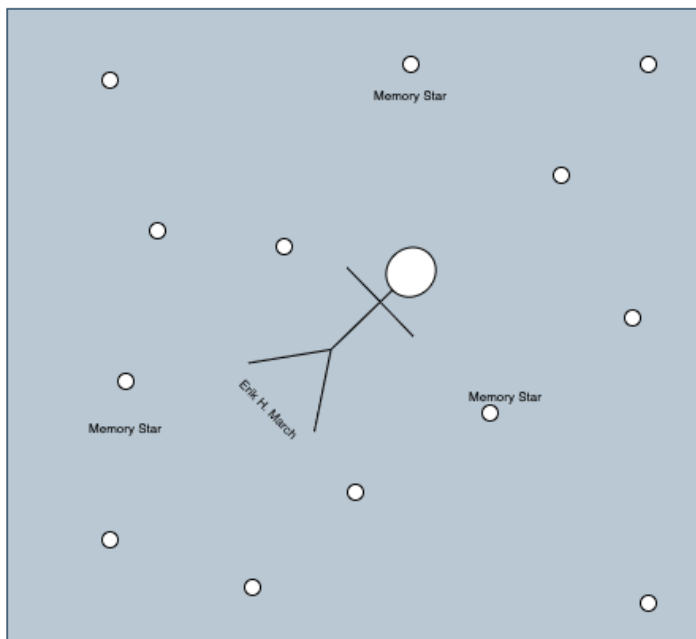


Figure 16: Page 5 Interaction Overview.



Introspection in the Void

The Void is the third setting of interaction within OVER TIME. After a hysteric episode once the reality of being locked in the office sets in, March is seen potentially hallucinating a light coming from the Upper Management office, upon entering March falls into a space void where time is seemingly flowing yet non-existent, given the opportunity to engage with his suppressed memories and desires before leaving the void. Clicking any memory star will play a video: March's concept of In My Head, March's thoughts on the PROXY Project and the intro to Ulrich Dex Hexen from PROXY (1.0), and March's first day at Fractured Haze.

Activities
Memory Star 1 - In My Head
Memory Star 2 - PROXY
Memory Star 3 - First Day

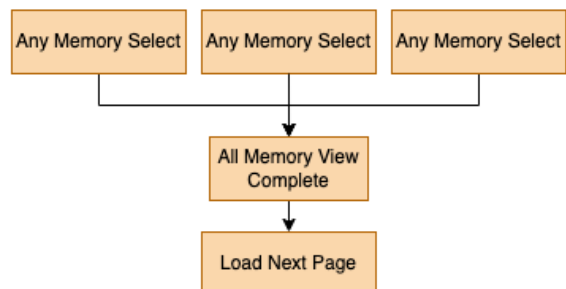


Figure 17: Page 13 Interaction Overview.

PHYSICAL INSTALL

The physical install (see [Appendix E](#)) is relatively simplistic in nature, meant to mimic the real life setting of an office space. Most notably, the desk surface contains story world elements such as name tags, worker notes, work documents, business cards, and sketches/a zine of the characters from In My Head (recycled as March's comic idea). The installation was intended to have a variety of clocks fixed to the walls all set to different times to further confuse players and add to the atmosphere of the anxiety of time, however sourcing physical clocks second hand as to not waste resources proved to be challenging. As such only three clock decorations are included in the final install although for future showings more may be added. The original storyboards (see [Appendix C](#)) for In My Head's interactions were included in the zine found on March's desk as mini flip-books within certain pages. This was done by printing copies of the story boards, cutting them and arranging them in order based on the zine's story.

MUSIC

The music for the OVER TIME consists of a 14-track original commissioned and former 2015 album created by Calvert Kennedy (also known as Sipmustard!). Throughout the process of development a large portion of gameplay was removed for brevity. Keeping in mind the final install as well as the intention for presentation at the graduate exhibition, I wanted to make sure that players/passersby were able to interact with OVER TIME in a meaningful way despite the short gameplay time. Due to the media elements of the story being changed through testing and feedback stages as well as due to overall scope, this posed a challenge of making a short experience feel varied in its perception of time. To combat this, alongside the different lengths of interaction within the different forms of media, different musical tracks were made specifically to evoke a certain feeling and emotion by making pages that were intended to give the impression of "long" time utilize slow and discombobulated tracks, and pages with a faster, more anxious pace of "short" time using faster tempos. The music also serves a dual purpose within the experience as although primarily meant as a backtrack and time indicator within the story, it also contributes to the feeling of players actually being at work, listening to music as they work and consume media they "shouldn't" be during their shift as implied during the playtesting sessions by participants.

PROTOTYPING & TESTING

In order to inform my design choices several prototypes of this project were created including an initial creation of In My Head within Unreal Engine 4. Once the shift was made to OVER TIME, the prototyping took on the form of asset drafting (i.e storyboards, sketches, etc.), game engine trial-and-error, and playtesting sessions. Throughout the playtesting sessions, participants were tasked with various objectives as a means of providing feedback to further the changes between iterations consisting of testing the digital story, reacting to drafts, discussions and questionnaires.

4.3.2a ALPHA TESTING

The playtesting sessions served as a means of gauging in what ways the theme of time in the workplace was understood by players. During the Alpha testing sessions, participants were required to meet in-person (unless otherwise arranged) in order to conduct playthroughs. Participants were required to interact with the digital story wireframes (a bare-bones game structure with placeholders) and were asked to comment on the quality of the interactions presented to them (i.e reading, observing, and basic gameplay mechanics) by providing feedback on how intuitive the controls were, how the pacing of the progression through the story was, etc. Participants were later shown the drafting material and script drafts to understand what was to be populated within the next iteration and provide feedback on the continuity of the story and comments on the art direction (i.e moodboards, sketches, sample of finalized versions).

PRESENTED MATERIALS

Participants were tasked with exploring the bare-bones digital story structure created in the Game Maker game engine as well as sketches, drafts and storyboards of the other assets to be put in the game engine later into development. Storyboards of the interactions and video pages were edited into short video placeholders within the game engine to simulate their final layout, likewise sketches of the comic pages were added as placeholders on their respective pages. Potential dialogue via scripts and additional sketches of previous ideas, layouts and setups were provided after the playtesting before the discussion. Participants were shown samples of what the final outcome was intended to look like in terms of visual aesthetic and music samples.

QUESTIONNAIRE & FEEDBACK RESULTS

Participants partook in a post-playtesting discussion to give insight on their overall reactions to the initial experience and were subsequently provided a questionnaire to fill in up to a week after the playtesting sessions with more detail after additional time to reflect. Overwhelmingly there were no issues in terms of understanding the controls to interact with the story however, it was suggested to implement more visual hints within the future physical install to learn about the pause menu that shows all the controls. When asked if there should be more interaction within the pages, it was noted by three out of the five participants that it would not only make more sense but also be more immersive to lean towards utilizing more comic pages as it made them feel as though they were actually killing time at work by reading a webcomic or playing a simple flash-style game as videos were something they personal struggle to hide in tabs at work given their use of sound and size on screen.

Participants all shared the similar sentiment of having done these very activities within their own workplaces during shifts and that the video pages were less important to them outside of them being a byproduct of an interaction. For example, within Act 3 of the story March is trapped in a void of space and time with participants prompted by brightly glowing stars to click on them, once clicked a video of a short flashback is played. Participants felt as though these short show-not-tell

videos within the interactions served more to progress the story than being outright told during the longer video pages as the comic pages in combination with the interactions provided enough context for the narrative. Participants noted that the narrative explained itself in too much detail that wasn't needed given the visuals and that although some explanation is needed to understand aspects of the story world, such as what Fractured Haze is, what a PROXY is, etc., that more mundane conversations would benefit from more of these show-not-tell moments as the length of the experience was fairly short to begin with.

OBSERVATIONS

When showing participants the different elements of the experience I noted the interest in the comic pages and the lead up to what would be the interactive portions of the story. This was further backed up by the feedback from the questionnaires as there was overwhelming feedback to lean into the digital art of the comics with short, immersive interactions and videos that made sense for the story world, but to lean away from the original heavy use of video cutscenes to further explain the plot. I had also recognized a parallel between the feedback against the use of video during the playtesting as when participants navigated the story in the game engine they were shown to look away from the screen as the videos played.

I noticed when participants were reading over the potential dialogue drafts that there was a common reaction of agreeing with March's struggles based on their facial expressions and verbal cues (often scoffs at a dialogue from a boss character or "ha" "ahh" in response to March). Participants also showed an interest in the juxtaposition of visuals being both drawn and photo-realistic, however it was not clear if participants understood the shift of the aesthetic becoming more drawn over the course of the story to symbolize March's growing agency within his own reality. This was likely due to the fact that the drafts did not clearly demonstrate this effect given their rough nature, the samples of the final products did not aid this. However, participants did note that they understood that other items within the interactive portions that were drawn signified that they were to be interacted with or focused on.

FINAL FINDINGS

I concluded that the changes needed to prepare for the Beta iteration and its respective playtesting session would be the following (see [Figure 2](#)):

- To shorten video pages from 40-60 seconds down to 20-30 seconds in order to fix the participants' suggestions of wanting to move between the story pages quicker instead of sitting and waiting for a video to finish.
- To create more comic based pages and potentially add more movement to them to make up for the decrease in video pages.
- To visually storytell more rather than leaning on direct explanations to the player through dialogue.
- To add more visual cues to the physical install that further explain how to access the pause menu to view the full controls.
- Make the script simplified and lettered in a more legible font.

4.3.2b BETA TESTING

During the Beta testing sessions, participants were required to meet online via MS Teams, Discord or in-person in order to conduct playthroughs. The questionnaire remains the same as the one used for the Alpha testing sessions, however the feedback differs with this iteration as only two participants from the previous playtesting session returned. This was done to remove bias from having previously seen the story format and narrative to allow for a fresh perspective as new participants did not know what to expect outside of the synopsis provided to them with their consent materials. In total 5 participants were selected for the Beta testing. The returning participants however, served as a control group for receiving input on how well the Beta iteration responded to the Alpha feedback. With this in mind, although the questionnaire was not altered between playtesting sessions it is important to note that returning participants were able to answer the questions to include input on the changes within the overview comments (i.e Additional Comments or where applicable within sections of the questionnaire).

PRESENTED MATERIALS

Participants were shown updated, nearly completed drafts containing the changes based on feedback from the Alpha testing sessions. Due to the fact that no feedback was given to change the interactions, no code was altered to the overall flow of the experience within the game engine outside of adjusting the order and type of pages (i.e shift from less video towards more comic pages, etc.). Participants were tasked with giving more in depth feedback on mainly the narrative and art direction of the project as it edged towards completion with the following being shown:

- Approved comic pages that were near completion or works in progress.
- Near completed assets to populate the interactive pages (i.e sprites, backgrounds, etc.).
- New storyboards for the video pages.
- Updated potential scripts to populate all pages.

It is worthy nothing that the comic pages did not contain dialogue bubbles or any text as I felt it would be counter-intuitive to finalize it within a page only to get feedback that there was a spelling error or to make a change that would result in text being less legible than intended given the predetermined bubble size.

QUESTIONNAIRE & FEEDBACK RESULTS

Returning playtesters commented on their pleasure in seeing the changes for an overall better user experience in comparison to what was presented in the Alpha testing, stating that there were overall better transitions between acts of the story. It was also noted that former participants also kept in mind the showing for the graduate exhibition and that with the shortening of the experience it would allow for more time to explore the physical space before interacting with the digital narrative.

One criticism that was shared between both playtesting sessions was the desire to have slightly more complex gameplay mechanics on the interactive pages. Despite the controls working and the overall experience being received well by participants, there was something left to be desired for having something more engaging during those moments. These changes were considered however given

my own abilities and time, it wasn't entirely feasible. I made a personal note that I was able to achieve this during PROXY (1.0) as I had a development partner, an interesting tie to my overarching research of employees sharing the load of work, however I am merely one designer.

Few participants between both playtesting sessions had shown interest in receiving a sticker or a plush of S.Omber from In My Head. To this regard I'm sure March would have been thrilled to create merchandise of "his" characters...if he were real.

OBSERVATIONS

The focus of the Alpha testing sessions as an investigator was to gauge what innate playstyle behaviours may be exhibited with no visual cues from placeholder assets or the narrative to guide them. For this iteration however, participants were observed during their reaction to the near completed experience as opposed to their understanding and choices of the gameplay controls, although feedback to this was taken into consideration but not actively focused on during the playtesting session.

During the Beta testing sessions participants were not required to interact with the game engine as no interactions had changed, however they were able to spend more time assessing the art direction and overall story. It was noted that two out of the five participants noticed the shift towards the art being more stylized near the end of the story. Interestingly these participants were from the new applicant pool and not returning playtesters. Four of the five participants commented on their desire to know more about the recycled use of In My Head either through the story or the physical space, as at the end of Act 4, In My Head is alluded to a fair bit, but outside of sketches on documents, not much is explained about why it is important to March. Participants suggested seeing papers of drafts of In My Head on the desk area to be picked up and explored. This was interesting as the original intention for In My Head as the first iteration of this project was to include a take-home zine of the story during the exhibition showing.

FINAL FINDINGS

The Beta testing was meant to serve a transition between a nearly finished OVER TIME to a fully realized iteration with a focus on general feedback of the overall experience. As such, there were last minute changes to be made, however nothing drastic between this version and the final released version given the timeframe. In order to refine the Beta version for release, I concluded that the changes that needed to be made were as follows (see [Figure 2](#)):

- Use less wordy dialogue for simplicity and legibility unless absolutely necessary in both comic and video pages.
- Focus on decorating the physical space to feel abandoned by time (i.e not upkept and disorderly).
- Find ways to add subtle movement to comic pages if possible to create a meaningful effect, not just for the sake of adding movement.
- Add more reference to In My Head through drafts and zine.

4.4 RELEASE

PRE-EXHIBITION

The install was intended to take place in as close as possible to a real office setting similar to its predecessor, PROXY (1.0). PROXY (1.0) was originally shown in an abandoned car dealership office that was reworked for the use of Toronto Metropolitan University's RTA: New Media undergraduate exhibition, META 2019, via The Black Cat Art Gallery. Ideally, OVER TIME would have returned to this location, however this was not possible as the land had been contracted to build condos.

Instead a workspace in the Digital Future's studio space at 205 Richmond St. W was altered to simulate an office cubicle. This change of scenery serves as a potential nod to the idea that the 4th act of the story takes place some time after the events of March being trapped within the office in Act 3. Although this is ultimately up for interpretation by the player, it could signify the transition between March moving departments to work on the PROXY project and thus ending up in the office seen in PROXY (1.0) prior to his departure from Fractured Haze.

OVER TIME is intended to be played within the physical space, however it may translate well to a home office setup or any external environment given the narrative-driven story for more accessible modes of play. Immersion may be taken away as a result of this as the documents and sketches left by March will not be present, however they are not explicitly intrinsic to understanding the story.

Leaning into the feedback of playtesting participants wanting to see more comic pages and less animated pages, animated sections were removed and movement was added to select comic pages to add variety to the otherwise still images. Likewise, due to time constraints for animating the entirety of all animated pages, the remaining "video" pages were shifted to be text-based with graphics in order to progress the narrative and provide transitions between pages.

The graduate exhibition that took place in April 2023 saw potentially more easter-eggs within the physical space that nod to In My Head, PROXY (1.0) and March's personal life...as well as more clocks. In relation to the usage of clocks within the physical space, an interesting tie between OVER TIME and PROXY (1.0) is the use of only one office clock in PROXY (1.0). Within the addition of OVER TIME changing and contributing to the world building of this story-universe, the use of a single clock could symbolize a countdown or the awareness of March knowing his time at Fractured Haze is near an end.

POST-EXHIBITION

The physical install of OVER TIME took place between March 31st - April 3rd, 2023 as part of OCADU's Digital Futures Graduate program exhibition titled: ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY. Due to the placement of OVER TIME within the physical space, players wandered between projects until they discovered an office nook off to the side of the exhibition space. Once in the space, players were able to interact with the desk and explore until they were ready to proceed with the digital story via the office computer.

A common, and welcome sentiment, that was shared between players was that even they wouldn't want to work March's job and or that they could relate to aspects of the story. In addition to this, players commented on the usage of music and the physical setting provided them with a sense of sensory deprivation that allowed them to fully immerse with the space and story. Overall, OVER TIME received overwhelmingly positive reception during this exhibition period.

The theme of worker agency is called into question during each individual playthrough. As players step into the space they are in control of how much time they wish to delegate towards exploration and learning about the setting, character, and controls. They are free to spend as little or as much time as they wish interacting with the space, and in some instances not interacting at all, instead opting to use their personal phones to answer messages or conversing with peers before shifting their attention to the project. However, once the computer is interacted with, the control of the time spent within the space and story is now under the control of March. This is interesting as March claims to understand that the time of employees is important, but continues to use their time for his own selfish reasons. The pacing of the story set by March is demonstrated in how fast or slow text appears on screen (this is also done to indicate a sense of speech pattern), as well as the given ability to skip over Page 5 (The Printer Room) in its entirety and or the inability to skip through Page 13 (The Void). In addition to this there is a sense of false agency given to players by March in the form of toggling through the comic pages as players may freely move forward or backward within the story at their own pace but are hindered by any interferences March has put in place to prevent them from further utilizing this agency of progression (i.e Page 5, Page 13, Page 15, and any videos within the interactions).

This notion of player agency can be understood as a parallel to the real world as although the workplace is indeed in need of further improvements, the scale is now shifting towards the employees and their assertion of demands for better working conditions and treatment by way of exercising their agency of choice and their time. OVER TIME gives players just enough agency in order to create a sense of control and comfort, however, is later disrupted to reveal that March ultimately has control over this situation. This reminds players that it is the employers who are coercing and exploiting employee time but at any point they may get up and walk away. This was demonstrated during the debut of the final install where instances of players getting up and leaving was also an option for players despite others sitting through the entire experience. In this way, OVER TIME suggests that despite our perception of the control being in the hands of the employer, it is really the employees who have the control of their time as this is reflected by concepts such as the aforementioned Quiet Quitting and rise in worker demands.

SECTION 5

UNTIL NEXT TIME

5.1 IN DUE TIME (FUTURE WORK)

As with any academic project, there are inevitably going to be peaks and pitfalls. With this, time management becomes increasingly crucial to the execution of, well, anything on your to-do list. I have no regrets in executing changes for better understanding or play, however I do wish I had more time to dedicate to adding more depth to OVER TIME, be it in the visuals, narrative, or otherwise. In the end, I am pleased with the result and the feedback (good or bad) I have received throughout the entirety of the creation process and beyond.

Reflecting on my decision to pull from a past personal works and recycle elements of use has given me a new tool of revisiting abandoned ideas and creating them into something useful for whatever the current project on hand is where I had otherwise been more rigid in my trajectory of where a project was headed based on the original pitch. Future iterations of this work may consist of combining both OVER TIME and PROXY (1.0) to create a larger story world and evolve to reflect any new developments that pertain to the research of this thesis in time, liminality, burnout, self-expression and exploitation. It is my intent that this current final iteration and any future iterations to come continue to spark interest in the critical discourse around the betterment of worker conditions and the condemnation of employee exploitation and inspire others to express their own perspectives and stories through their own practice or commentary. This, however, shall all be explored further, in due time.

5.2 LAST TIME (REFLECTION)

In Section 1 I reviewed the current state of the contemporary workplace and its impacts on employees and their perception of time and how they are coerced into offering extra time to their jobs. Section 2 explored this in depth through the metaphor of time as a currency and applied it directly to a specific setting, the game design industry. To further the parallels between life and art, I explored the contrast between time in the game design industry and how that translates to time as a mechanic within games. Using research through design methods such as game design research and iterative design as well as a backing of critical design, the project of OVER TIME took its course.

OVER TIME originally manifested as a different concept. Over time (pun intended), it naturally evolved into what is seen today with the recycling of project concepts of times past and present. My previous work, PROXY (1.0), an otherwise retired project, served as a foundation for worldbuilding and further deepening the once background character of Erik H. March. This was done through traversing the world within Fractured Haze Inc., March's place of employment, and his sense of corrupted time due to the expectations and exploitations of him as a worker. The original concept of In My Head was translated into the narrative and story act structure as it utilized the same thematics but through a different mode of storytelling. The characters of In My Head, as well as the core of its story being one rooting in a more specific individualist private struggle with burnout, was recycled as March's personal practice passion project through sketches on work documents, a zine and an implied fully realized comic at the end of OVER TIME's story.

Through the process of an Alpha and Beta playtesting session, participants called into question the narrative and its criticality of its contents through feedback and discourse. During these playtesting sessions the mechanics, art direction and narrative were tested for their ease of flow, understandability, and ability to convey the topic of research through thematics. Although met with generally positive and simplistic feedback, there were some aspects to be desired such as more complex interactions. However, participants resonated and empathized with the theme of losing time, both exemplified with real world deadlines and the process of sacrificing more of your time to work. Leaving your leisure time and time to do the things that fulfill you by the wayside in a society that rewards those who are coerced into the crunch.

In retrospect, the game development process for OVER TIME was ironic in the sense that elements were cut out of the intended length of the gameplay due to time constraints and potential factors surrounding human interaction (i.e how long a player is willing to sit and play without losing focus), three instances of time being altered. I learnt that time is an ever confusing concept to wrap my head around if I thought about it for too long. This caused some anxiety when in my actual place of work, counting down the minutes to the end of my shift, how long it would take me to commute home, eat dinner, rest and calculate how much time that would leave me to

work. In hindsight, it is remarkably clear that this anxiety barred most of any potential progressions that were left behind as the clock continued to countdown, but then again, I am only human. I need not be so hard on myself as in the end, OVER TIME was completed.

To save time, I could have very well stayed with the concept of In My Head, however this would have posed issues within the research of the relationships between time and workplace as In My Head was more so inspired by the isolation (of the transitional-pandemic era) and anxiety of the time to be alone with your thoughts and reflect. I did not see staying with the original iteration as sustainable long term as the subjectivity of Omber as a character vessel for the player could have backed me into a corner of constantly needing to change to accommodate as many perspectives as I could as opposed to March as an established character with an established past.

CONCLUSION

In 2016 I had received an offer to work as an intern for a Triple-A video game development company where it was required of me to move from Toronto to Edmonton for 4 months, find my own accommodation, work 45+ hour work weeks for minimum wage (which was out of the norm at the time since unpaid internships were not yet illegal). This did not seem like a feasible deal to me, I promptly declined the offer despite their prestigious reputation. As the years passed and I continued to apply to jobs within the game development field (with my skills slowly declining in the process due to lack of time to upkeep the practice), the less I desired to work in them as the exploitative practices became blatantly clear to me during interviews and reaching out to other employees via LinkedIn to get an idea of what the working environment was like as with the exception of few specific roles within certain companies, the complaints and coercion was rife.

Throughout my research of the Game Design industry for this thesis, I felt an overwhelming sense of disheartenment as to what may lay ahead for me within the state of the work environment in any near-future job prospects should I choose to enter the Game Design industry myself, beyond this masters degree. That said, I am not entirely pessimistic of what may be waiting for me beyond the threshold of graduation. Through the research into the employee uprising of prioritizing their time provides me with faith; not hope, as hope implies a lack; faith in a change for the better.

The rose-tinted illusion of how fun it would be to work for a dev-company was shattered by the realization that this was just another capitalist industry that would work me tirelessly, leaving me burnt out and discarded to the side in any attempts to actively climb the corporate ladder. This experience would later inform the initial concept of this project titled *In My Head*, as well as the current iteration of *OVER TIME*, both of which deal with the consequences of rejection (ex. Of a job promotion) and burnout of employees and their ability to cope within and outside of the workplace environment. This resonated with my responsibility as the developer of *OVER TIME* to take on the role of the artist, programmer and producer which led to my own burnout. Although not enforced by an employer and having no monetary incentive to move forward, the academic student-work environment of school surely brings high-stress deadlines and with much at stake should failure occur such as, but not limited to wasted tuition, life-goal delays, and overall disheartenment. This pressure pushed me towards exploring how the time experienced in the game design workplace could be utilized as a non-traditional game mechanic.

The result of The Great Resignation during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the rejection of Crunch Culture and its subsequent side-effects, such as Hurry Sickness. Workers are instead choosing to leverage their time in a way that is more sustainable for them whilst pursuing the monetary and fulfilling need to work. Despite its importance as an objective universal unit of measure for many aspects of our daily lives (ex. Age, date, history, etc.), time is a limited and precious resource

that is experienced and utilized objectively. Although working conditions may be stagnant in their shift towards improvement and the worker uprise of demands of better respect of their time, there may be hope in the post-pandemic era as workers continue to assert their desires to work within a mutually-beneficial system that sees more favourable working conditions, environments, pay and recognition.

Throughout this thesis, both in its paper and project, has been the answer to the ever-lurking question of what the relationships between time and the workplace are. In short, although the corruption of capitalism sees jobs perpetually exploiting their workers with both the aid and hindrance of technology that blurs the lines between corporate and private life by means of money and control, the power is slowly starting to shift in the favour of the employee. Within the world of Game Design, working conditions put strain on employees to upkeep their skills as artists, programmers, etc., in their own time while also sacrificing that same time working on assignments with ever changing deadlines that guilt employees into being flexible with their precious time. In the end, as demonstrated by March's realization in *OVER TIME*, it is our time. Certainly there are unavoidable responsibilities that require us to conform to the structures of society, much like working to make a living, but it is still our time. Our time to save, our time to invest, our time to waste. Despite these external pressures, we ultimately choose, at any given moment, how we spend our time.

I would like to thank you, the reader, for spending your time with this thesis.



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APPENDIX A: REB Appendices

Overview

OVER TIME is an interactive story that follows a burnt-out employee of the fake reality development company, Fractured Haze [Reality Inc.], as they work through what seems to be a never ending work day, questioning if this is what they want to get out of life while worrying their decline in work will result in termination from their ominously never-seen boss. The research surrounding this project consists of an exploration of how time is constructed and utilized within the workforce and creative practice and in what ways it may impact creative workers.

What: An interactive, playable story with two play testing sessions to test development approaches and explore thematic elements related to time, burnout, and catharsis.

Who: 5 participants will be selected from an applicant pool consisting of a diversity of experience levels and play styles such as, but not limited to: game development student, casual gamer, non-gamer, etc. Applications will be sought from across the OCAD U student community via verbal request, personal social media ad or email from the principal investigator, Milena Satrohan, directly to apply. Applicants will participate in both play testing sessions.

Why:

OVER TIME is a narrative driven experience with key playable portions that progress the story and engage the player within its themes. It is intrinsic to my development to get constructive critiques on the current state of play; Is the intended narrative being conveyed? Are the mechanics user-friendly? Are the controls accessible and understandable? How is the playability? Alongside this, observations on how the aforementioned demographics react to gameplay mechanics to gauge overall user experience are necessary.

Where: Hosted hybridly on site at the OCADU Digital Futures Graduate Studio and online using MS Teams.

Structure:

WINTER 2023

The Winter Break/Winter Semester will host both an Alpha and Beta playtest of the project over the course of two sessions following format:

1. Participating in an playthrough on site at OCAD U or Synchronously Online (via MS Teams) with recorded observations (1 hr)
2. Post-Play Online/In-Person Discussion of Experience (30 mins)
3. Post-Play Online/In-Person Questionnaire (30 mins) *Can be completed up to a week after the playthrough experience for further reflection time.

The Alpha testing will consist of participants playing a rough demo of the game that may not be completed in its entirety. This is mainly to test the initial responses to the narrative and mechanics to then be refined later and serve to contribute to the design process and development of the Beta version using the feedback and observations from the Alpha sessions.

During the Beta testing, the improvements made with the feedback of the Alpha will be showcased in a near finished product, this session will allow for any last minute feedback to be taken into account for the final iteration of the experience.

The Beta playthrough of the project consists of a more refined, near completed version of the project to observe the understanding of the gameplay mechanics as well as narrative thematics.

Time Requirement (in hours): Approx. 2 hrs.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University [File #102306, 2023-05]. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through research@ocadu.ca.

Recruitment Materials

Call for participation from all gamer types recruitment for the user testing will be carried out as follows:

1. Using verbal invitations, Digital Futures MS Teams/Discord Outreach, Personal Social Media Outreach, and Email to recruit applicants.
 - a. Post text: "Interested in experimental game development? Join us to explore the immersive narrative and interaction through the playable story of OVER TIME. Requirements: Must be over 18 years of age and located in the GTA. To apply [information based on outreach platform] or email msatrohan@ocadu.ca with the subject line "RE: OVER TIME TESTING".
 - b. Post info: "This playable story is a thesis project for the Digital Futures, Masters of Design program."
 - c. Image:



2. Advertisement image/banner will include a link to an application form hosted on Survey Monkey to capture applicant name, email address, and brief reason for application with any additional information applicants. The form captures: name, email address, and rationale for participation.

This interactive story is part of a Digital Futures Masters of Design Thesis project. The play testing is open to OCADU community members; both current students, alumni, and external applicants of interest. Participants will be selected based on availability on play testing days.

Successful applicants will receive an email at least 10 days prior to the play testing inviting them to participate in the research study. The email will include the consent form and photo and video release as well as Appendix A: Overview. These documents will also be available

prior to onsite or online playthrough for both Play Testing Sessions. There is a possibility that research participants may be previous or current students of the supporting advisors.

Invitation and Consent Form In My Head - Play Testing Session Winter 2023

Key Contacts:

Milena Satrohan, Principal Researcher Creator
Student, Digital Futures
OCAD University msatrohan@ocadu.ca

DATES

WINTER 2023

Alpha - January 9th-20th

Beta - February 20th-March 23rd

Project Advisors:

Emma Westecott, Primary Advisor OCAD University ewestecott@ocadu.ca
Cindy Poremba, Secondary Advisor OCAD University
cporemba@ocadu.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this project is to explore the ease of use and in-game mechanics and narrative throughout a playable story.

These play testing sessions serve as a means to improve the user experience and user interface in two stages (alpha testing - rough near finished prototype, beta testing - refined near finished final product).

This playable story is a Digital Futures Masters of Design Thesis project. The play testing is open to OCAD U community members; both current students, alumni, and interested external applicants.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

The play testing sessions will provide you with the opportunity to navigate different stages of development of the interactive story in order to explore ease of play, user experience, user interface, narrative and overall gameplay feel.

The play testing will take place during two sessions during the Winter 2023 Semester and will consist of in-person alpha testing as well as online beta testing the total time of commitment for these play testing sessions is 2 hours per session, during which participants will:

1. Participating in an playthrough on site at OCAD U or Synchronously Online with recorded observations (1 hr)
2. Post-Play Online/In-Person Discussion of Experience (30 mins)
3. Post-Play Online/In-Person Questionnaire (30 mins) *Can be completed up to a week after the playthrough experience for further reflection time.

If you elect to participate in this research study in addition to the play testing, you

will: be asked to come to campus/attend an online session to explore the interactive experience and discuss experience with the project team; complete a brief online/in-person questionnaire post-user testing and be interviewed on completion.

During the testing, you will be invited to document the process and results on a shared document so that this information can be shared with others. Documentation materials may include notes, sketches, and writing relating to the design and gameplay style; photos and videos captured by you or your team members; and photos and videos captured by the researcher via recorded online sessions.

The research generated in this project will be used to better understand how to further develop the in-game mechanics and current state of play as well as observations on how the aforementioned demographics react to the gameplay's mechanics to gauge overall user experience.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

The User Testing sessions are educational in nature, and are meant to support and expand the creative processes of the project with the constructive critiques of the participants.

- Possible risks of participation user testing include:
 - Participants may feel a sense of urgency prompted by certain timed game mechanics, this is minimized at the start of the play session by participants being informed that there are no strict time constraints within the gameplay outside of the imagery of time.
 - Participants may find the setting of the interactive story eerie, this is minimized by the cartoon aesthetic of the experience.
 - The experience may briefly cover sensitive topics such as depression, anxiety. This is minimized by the overall positive ending and message of the experience.
 - Liminal and eerie visual imagery may be used throughout the experience to give an impression of loneliness/emptiness that may be unsettling to some players, this is minimized by the use of humour and a cartoon aesthetic throughout the experience.
 - There is a slight risk that participants may feel pressured to obtain a certain outcome through the gameplay, this is minimized by stating at the beginning of the play test that there is no pressure to achieve a certain outcome/ending throughout the experience.
 - Possible benefits of participation in the play testing include:
 - The opportunity to play-test a unique interactive story experience.
 - Contribution towards the design process of the final completed iteration
 - An enjoyable gameplay and critique experience.
 - The opportunity to contribute to research publications and development evolution.
 - The ability to influence and inform future research offered by OVER TIME
- It is possible that you will not experience any or all of the potential benefits or risks listed above.

CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

This project collects the following types of data: material generated by the research stages listed above which will not be confidential and shared as a part of general development and raw data that will be kept confidential and discarded after the testing sessions. The project information and hosting website (portfolio) will be shared with the general public.

ATTRIBUTING WORK

It is our intent to acknowledge and celebrate the contributors (user testing participants) in this research creation process by naming them and providing attribution for their work. If you consent to participate in this study, you can choose whether or not your name will appear alongside images of the work you produced during the play tests. Should your work be selected for use by project partners, you will be contacted via email prior to publication with examples of usage.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions and/or participate in any component of the study. Participants may choose to withdraw from the sessions within the stated time frames (up to a week before or after the alpha and beta session dates)

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

All non-confidential data will be shared with advisors and juries overseeing the development documentation as well as all play testing participants, and the larger community. The resulting documentation will be shared with the general public. Results of this study may be published in presentations, online project documentation, social media, and promotional material for future showings, such as usage within a public portfolio or documentation recordings of play testing sessions made available online.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Milena Satrohan (Principal Researcher) using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University [File #102306, 2023-05]. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office through research@ocadu.ca.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this Consent Form. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw within a week before or after the scheduled play testing sessions.

General Participation

☐ Yes, I consent to participation in this study. I understand that questionnaire responses and observational notes will be confidential. I also understand that all resulting process and prototype documentation (including photos, videos, and any items posted to the documentation) will not be confidential and may be published in presentations, online project documentation, social media, and promotional material for future showings, such as usage within a public portfolio or documentation recordings of play testing sessions made available online.

☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Attribution

☐ Yes, I wish to receive attribution for my contributions. You may use my name as listed below alongside images or videos of the contributions I create during the user testing. ☐ No, I do not wish for my name to be used in association with images or video of the contributions I create during the user testing.

Media Release

☐ Yes, I consent to appear in recorded online play testing sessions that may include the video and audio of myself

☐ No, I do not consent to appear in any recordings consisting of video or audio of myself.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Play Testing and Discussion

During the Winter 2023 play testing sessions for the Alpha and Beta1 versions, participants will be given a format to play test on (provided equipment in-person and or a link for itch.io for online testers, *in-person players can choose to play on their own devices if they so choose using the itch.io link). In-person participants will be provided with a pen and paper to make notes as they progress through the gameplay, online participants will be asked to contribute to a shared Google Document. All sessions will comply with OCAD U's Safety Protocols as well as any and all COVID-19 Protocols.

Alpha - Alpha Testing is a type of software testing performed to identify bugs before releasing the product to real users or to the public.

Beta - Beta Testing is performed by real users of the software application in a real environment.

All participants will have up to 1 hour to take their time progressing through the experience at their own pace while taking notes. Upon completion, participants will be asked to give an overview of their experience along with any critiques during the discussion time up to 30 minutes each session. As a final step, participants will be provided a post-testing questionnaire to fill out during a 30 minute period. Participants will not exceed a 4 hours of play testing across the two sessions but will have access to the play test materials to reference at their own leisure to inform their feedback during the 1 week critique timeframe.

As previously mentioned, immediately following the play testing sessions participants will join a discussion on any thoughts, feedback and observations made throughout their play testing with, but not limited to, the following prompts:

Alpha Play Testing Session

- Open feedback. Anything the participant would like to state without the guidance of a prompt about the experience.
- What was the story about to you?
- What did you find the most impactful about the experience?
- What was the least impactful aspect of the experience?
- What themes were you able to recognize within the narrative?
- What do you feel is missing from the experience?
- How intuitive were the mechanics and controls of the playable portions?

Beta Play Testing Session

- Open feedback. Anything the participant would like to state without the guidance of a prompt about the experience.
- What did you find the most impactful about the revised experience?
- What was the least impactful aspect of the revised experience?
- What themes were you able to recognize within the revised narrative?
- What do you feel is missing from the experience?
- How intuitive were the mechanics and controls of the playable portions?
- What has changed since the first playthrough for you?
- How have the revisions changed your understanding of the narrative? In what ways?¹

During the play testing sessions, the primary researcher will observe participants as they engage with the experience using a similar framework to what will later be asked during the discussion period (ex. How long does it take for participants to figure out the mechanics and controls? Where are they getting stuck within the experience? etc.), however this is to better gauge how others respond to the experience with no guidance or explanations. Any and all note-worthy observations will be recorded during this time with flexibility to observe behaviors and methods not yet thought of within the framework.

¹ GeeksforGeeks. "Difference between Alpha and Beta Testing", Published by pp_pankaj, 2022.

Post-User Testing Questionnaire

This 30 minute online/in-person debrief questionnaire takes place after (up to a week) the play testing session and discussion and seeks to capture reflections from the experience:

General

- Tell us about your experience playing the game?
- What did you find yourself enjoying most during your process? Why?
- What, if anything, would you add or take away from the gameplay experience?
- What, if anything, will you take from this experience?
- How did you feel the themes of the story mixed within the interactions?

Technical

- How long did it take to understand the game mechanics? Do you feel as though less or more instruction was needed?
- How did you find the moving comic panels elements? (i.e Were they dizzying? Were they engaging? etc.)
- How did you find the playable interactive pages? (page numbers to be decided)
- How engaging did you find the playable experience (i.e reading, watching, and interaction)?
- Is there one of the elements you wish there was more of?
- Where, if at all, did you lose interest or attention to the experience?

Thematic

- How easy was it to understand the sequence of events and play through the story?
- Could you relate to the experience through immersion with the narrative? • Describe the story in one sentence.
- What were the key themes of the story?
- Are there plot-holes that need further explanation within the narrative? If so, how did that affect the experience as a whole? Did it break the immersion?

The post play testing questionnaire will be made available to participants via a secure Survey Monkey link. Participants will have access to the project to refer back to at their leisure in order to better inform their answers for the questionnaire for up to a week after the play testing session.

Research Protocol

Details

Principal Researcher(s): Milena Satrohan

Advisors: Emma Westecott (Primary), Cindy Poremba (Secondary)

Timeframe: Fall 2022 - Winter 2023

Type: Research Play Testing of Gameplay Mechanics & Narrative Scheduling: During Winter Break/Winter 2023 Semester Duration: 2 Hours Per Session, 2 Sessions, 4 Hours Total

Research Question & Objectives

The research objectives of the dissertation is to explore the concept and design of time in the workplace through a creative practice lens, more specifically the relationships of catharsis, creative practice, burnout, and exploitation as it pertains to the structure of time through experimental and philosophical design research methods. The experiential creation process will consist of a mixed-media playable story consisting of video, comic pages and interactive pages to experience all surrounding the day in a life of a tired and jaded employee of a company and the ways in which they are dealing with their relationships to the aforementioned concepts within the time parameter of a working shift. The objective of the play testing is to get a sense of what players may experience through the interactions as well as their interpretations of the narrative as well as provide technical feedback on the usability and ease-of understanding of the project.

Equipment & Supplies

- ☐ Consent forms
- ☐ Contact information for participants
- ☐ Notebook, sketchbook and pen for note taking (recommended for both researchers and participants)
- ☐ Primary recorders (phone or specialized device)
- ☐ Play Equipment (personal devices or provided equipment)
- ☐ Online repository for file transfer and archiving

PRE-SCREENING

- A. Participants selected by project partners based on skills profile from applicant pool responding to call for participation.
- B. Invitation sent out via email (4 weeks prior to session).
- C. Send out information and consent forms via email as an invitation to confirmed participants for return and to ask if there are any questions or need for clarification. a. Collect signed consent forms.
- D. Repository setup + invite.
- E. Play testing session, discussion and post play testing questionnaire (2 sessions, 2hrs/session, 4 hours total).

PLAY TESTING SESSIONS

- A. These testing sessions will take place either at OCAD U or at the participant's home on equipment loaned to them by the project or a personal device. The group will meet synchronously in-person and for online participants, synchronously on MS Teams.
 - a. Play Testing opening: Welcome, Introductions and re-visit contents of Participant Consent Form with group.
 - b. Disclaimer rundown of potential risk factors and reassurance to participants of minimizing any negative experiences during the play testing sessions.
- B. During the user testing participants will be progressing through the provided gameplay, making notes and critiquing the experience. Documents will consist of hand-written notes, online notes via Google Docs. and saved to a shared repository.
- C. Participants will keep note of any notable experiences, game elements and core themes present within the gameplay during their testing.

AFTER PLAY TEST (1 hr)

- 1. The post play testing discussion will take place immediately after a participant has completed the testing and formulated their thoughts on the experience (30 minutes).
- 2. Post play testing Questionnaire. This 30 minute online/in-person debrief questionnaire takes place after the user testing session and discussion and seeks to capture reflections from the experience. This questionnaire can be completed and submitted up to a week after the play testing session has been completed at the leisure of the participant if not done immediately following their session.
- 3. All questionnaires, notes, photos, videos and the like will be consented for collection and added to the repository for reference throughout the remaining thesis production.

References

GeeksforGeeks. "Difference between Alpha and Beta Testing", Published by pp_pankaj, 2022. t.ly/vEsV

APPENDIX B: PROXY (1.0)

[PROXY \(1.0\)](#) was created in 2018/2019 by Milena Satrohan and Michael Italiano as part of the TMU RTA:New Media undergraduate thesis requirements.

A Commentary on the fear of the artist working a “dull desk job” as their creativity surpasses and abandons them. PROXY (1.0) follows the story of Fractured Haze Employee, Erik H. March, as he goes against company protocols by illegally creating and uploading a PROXY of himself (Ulrich Dex Hexen) to the system as a statement of rebellion against what the company stands for (being caught up in your dreams but never having them come true).

A combination of both physical interaction and video game play, this ARG has players assume the role of a new hire taking over March's role in the company, curiosity takes over as players rummage around the documents left over by March as they search for a password to the computer, once logged in a trigger activates Hexen, whom must hack against in order to save the company files from being stolen and corrupted, lest you be fired like your predecessor. This project included easter eggs and music provided by peers within the graduating class in the form of music and visuals hidden within the game.

PROXY - One element of an individual's stream of consciousness sampled from an individual that takes on a mind of its own while still having a link to its origin, it is then uploaded into a fabricated reality by Fractured Haze.

A PROXY serves as a flushed out feature of oneself without being identical to its origin, in the case of Erik H. March, Hexen represents his desire for rebellion and freedom.

This project was nominated for a TARA award from TMU (formerly Ryerson University) in April 2019 for Best Maker Project. PROXY (1.0) has been showcased at: META 2019, CSI Collider Showcase 2019, Bit Bazaar 2019, RAW Artists 2019 (Toronto). This installation is currently retired.

In relation to OVER TIME, this project serves as a loose sequel demonstrating March's motives that lead to the start of PROXY (1.0). It is implied at the end of OVER TIME that March has created Ulrich Dex Hexen and set him loose on the servers of Fractured Haze as the first PROXY. March and Hexen were intended to be far more malicious in intent within PROXY (1.0), however there is a continuity error across the two projects as the March seen in OVER TIME seems far more calm about the situation he has left behind at Fractured Haze. This was due to the fact that PROXY (1.0) is set to be rebooted and sees March release Hexen as a means of mildly annoying the company as opposed to destroying it from the inside out, with the potential of Hexen becoming corrupted later on due to the poor planning of the PROXY project.

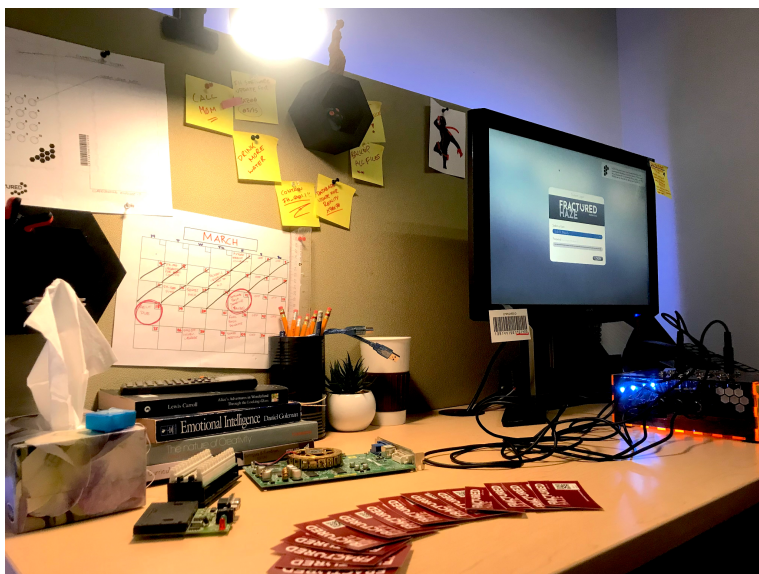
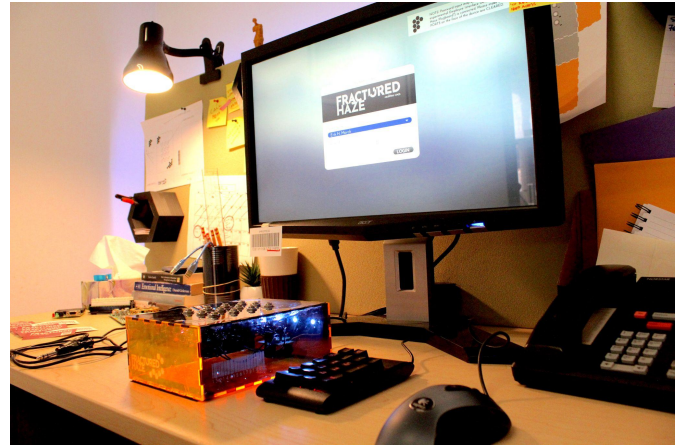
PROXY (1.0) took on a similar form of an office space, sans clocks, decorated with Fractured Haze company assets and a “plugboard” that was intended to be a prototype of something March was tasked with creating before his departure from the company. The plugboard was used to confuse players as to how to navigate “fighting off” Hexen’s attempts at hacking by using a non-traditional control system. The installation also included a company phone that was programmed to play certain voicemails when specific buttons were pressed. Most notably, March had a “Mom” button programmed on his phone, when pressed a voicemail of his mother would play asking him how he was and if he was drinking enough water, an easter egg that tied in with a sticky note reminder to drink more water pinned to his work board.

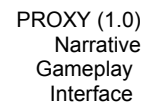
PROXY (1.0) was designed for players to fail, in that players were able to win hacking challenges but as they progressed through the narrative it became clear that is what Hexen wanted them to do. The story ends with players losing regardless of their attempts as Hexen declares that it’s no use and that “March is already here”. This final comment was a nod to Erik H. March but also the due date month of PROXY (1.0) as an undergraduate thesis.



PROXY (1.0) Key Visual - Ulrich Dex. Hexen interacts with "The Oracle" in the fabricated reality as he plans his mischief towards Fractured Haze.

PROXY (1.0) - META 2019 Showcase





```
Running verification protocols.
Scanning filesystem integrity.
. . . .
=====SCAN COMPLETED=====
Faults detected:      3
No critical data loss detected.

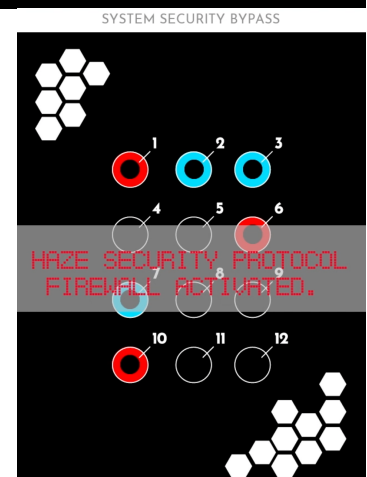
>> Initializing employee access terminal

Fractured Haze Employee Access Terminal

Reality Database
connected to node : 70X90 (Cortex- 243 active users)
simulation status : FHL001.1 Ready
                  (Callsign: Ulrich Dex Hexen)

Before activation, please ensure the
Employee Interface Device ("Fractured
Haze Plusboard") is CONNECTED
(lights are ON) and ALL PORTS on the
face of the device are CLEAR of any
connections.

Loading workspace . . .
Welcome back, [ ERIK MARCH ].
```



APPENDIX C: In My Head

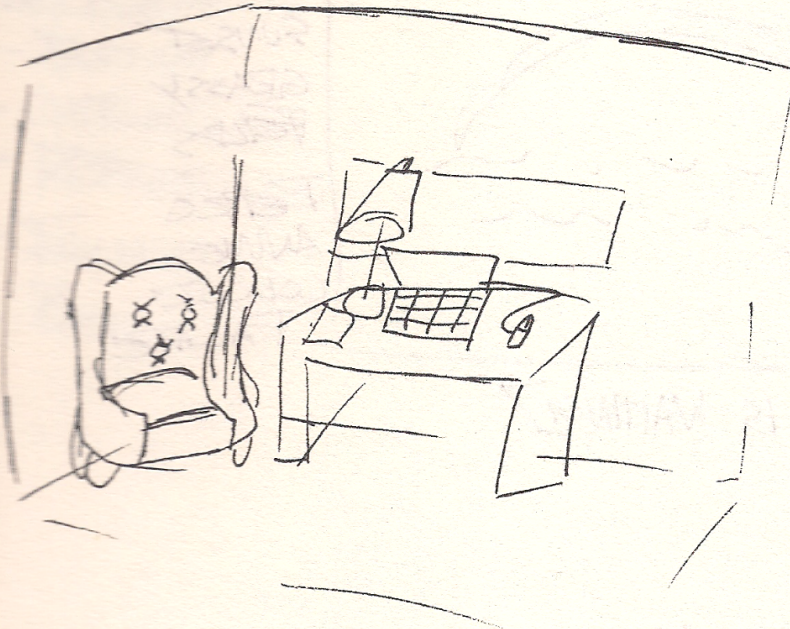
In My Head was an interactive story that follows the story of S. Omber who has come to a point of complete inner collapse due to burnout and seeks out professional help. After several implied therapy sessions, Omber is given a red journal as a method of finding solace through daily writing activities; As Omber goes about the day and is faced with the symptoms and cycles of burnout, Omber must navigate the day with these handicaps while using the journal to improve the circumstances to the best of their abilities lest the overwhelming nature of the intrusive thoughts consume their mind. This project is accompanied by two mini companion projects in the form of a take home zine and a tangible version of the journal for passersby to contribute during exhibition showings as an extension of the in-game mechanic.

IN MY HEAD



In My Head Key Visual of S.Omber and The Burnout Monster

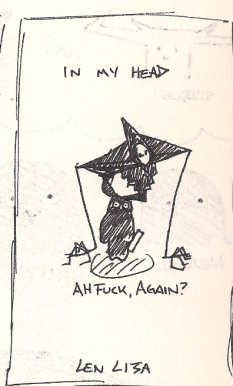
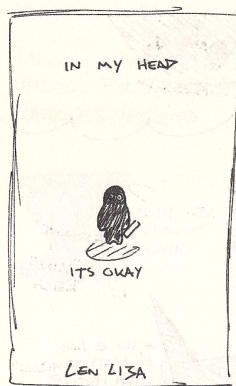
THE MANIFESTO OF NOTHING • DIGITAL FUTURES OR IN MY HEAD



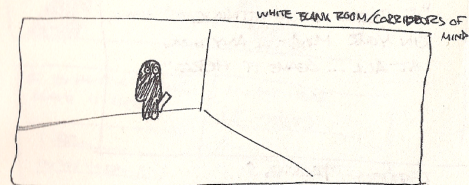
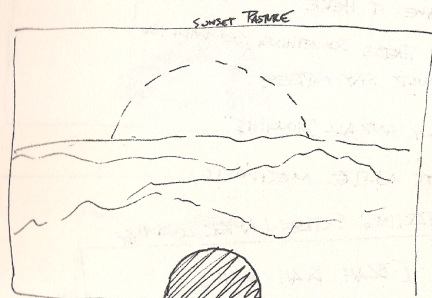
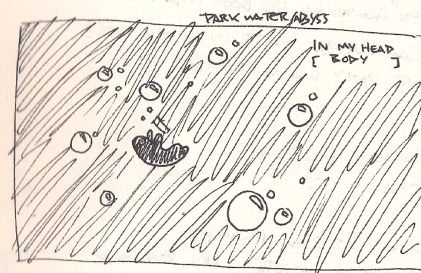
- BURNOUT *
- DEPRESSION ^{OVER} _{WHEN}
- FAILURE
- NIHILISM
- PAST
- ABSURDISM
- EXISTENTIALISM
- TIME / LOST-TIME *
- PRESENT
- REALITY
- CATHARSIS *
- FUTURE
- RADICAL ACCEPTANCE
- GROWTH
- CARE

GAME SEQUENCE

3 STAGES, EACH DEALING WITH THE SEGMENTED TOPICS ABOVE. EACH STAGE SHOULD HAVE 1 MAJOR & UNIQUE MECHANIC AS THE PLAYER NAVIGATES, THE OTHER ELEMENTS MAY BE MINOR MECHANICS, EVENTS, VISUALS OR THE LIKE



- SATIRE
 - DARK HUMOUR
 - FUNNY
 - SAD
 - HOPEFUL
 - CATHARTIC
 - LIKE AN INCONVENIENCE THAT CONSUMES YOU
- "I'M JUST TRYING TO HELP"
GIVENBELOW



SOT NOTE MECHANIC

TO DO
~
~
~
~

PULL UP
SCREEN
OR
PROMPT
ANIMATION

POSSIBLE MECHS.

- SOT NOTE
- BREATH MONITOR
- SANITY COUNTER

• MEANT TO PRIME ANXIETY

• BURNOUT HAPPENS AS YOU COMPLETE TASKS

• TASKS CAN GET ADDED.

• SELF HELP TASKS CAN FEEL FORGET AND FEEL LIKE A CHORE / NOT WORKING

★ DOING IT/ GETTING BETTER FOR YOURSELF. VS. BECAUSE OTHERS WANT YOU TO

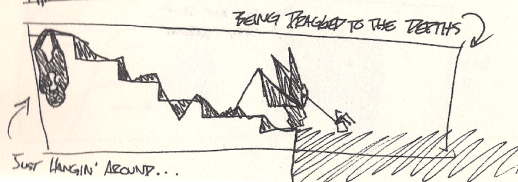
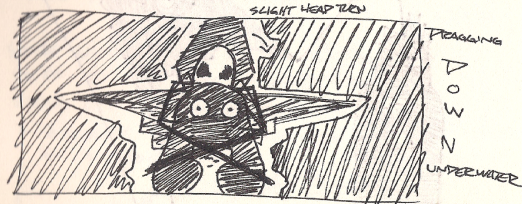
★ DE-MAKING
• NOW THAT THINGS ARE EDGING ON HYPERREALISTIC WHAT IS TO BE SAID ABOUT RE-EVOLUTIONS AND THE DESIRE FOR THAT

CHARACTER NAME

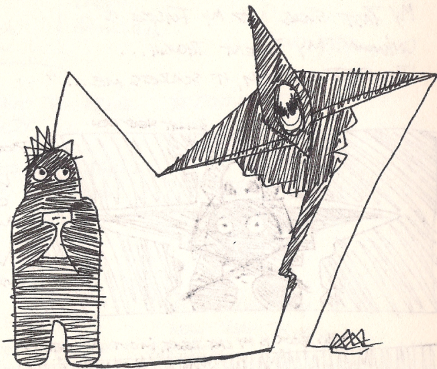
STEVEN *SOUNDS LIKE SOMBER
S. OMB *IS REALLY FROM
"SEX BOB OMB" SEVEN OMB

DIALOGUE - INNER - S. OMB

"FAMILY ISSUES, TRAUMA, SURE, YEAH, THEY BOTHER ME BUT I CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST. MY ISSUE IS MY PRESENT. MY PAST SUCKS AND MY FUTURE IS UNKNOWN. MY PRESENT THOUGH... ITS OVERWHELMING, IT SCARES ME..."



* IS BUMPING FOR STEVEN SIGNIFICANT?



HAS NO LEGS
TO STAND
ON ITS OWN

• BURNOUT IS STRONG
BUT PAGES YOU ALONG

• LIKE IN SWIMMING,
HOLDS YOU DOWN
TO STAY AHEAD

• DOES EACH TASK ON THE SET
NOTES POSS:

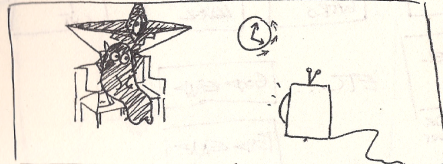
- 1 CUTSCENE
- 1 PROBLEM TO PLAY
- 1 SOLUTION (WIN CONDITION)
- 1 FAILURE (LOSE CONDITION)

HOW MANY INCOMPLETED TASKS LEADS TO END GAME?
SHOULD THERE EVEN BE A LOSE CONDITION?

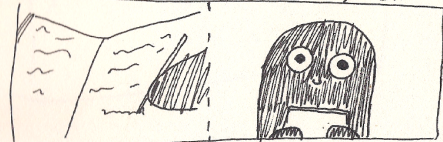
SHOULD HAVE UNEVEN TO DO LIST, 5-7 THINGS
TO DO. EX. 3/5 TASKS COMPLETED/PASSED
= WIN, 2/5 TASKS COMPLETED/PASSED = LOSE?

* PROBABLY 5, DON'T BITE OFF MORE THAN
YOU CAN CHOMP

LOSE "BAD" END



WIN "GOOD" END



Task List

LEVEL 1 • GET OUT OF BED/MAKE BED

LEVEL 2 • TO WORK

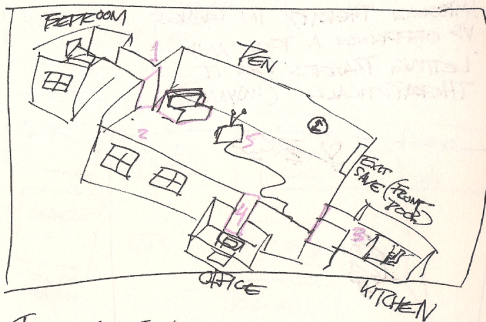
LEVEL 3 • EAT

LEVEL 4 • STRETCH / YOGA

LEVEL 5 • ENJOY AN ACTIVITY

1 BED
2 EAT
3 WORK
4 SHOWER
5 ENJOY

PLAYABLE AREA

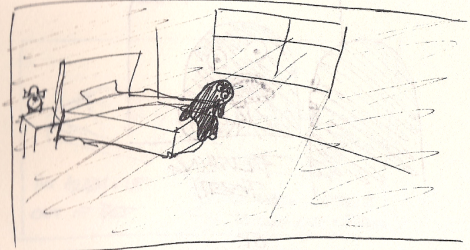


TOUCH THE TASK LIST VS CHOOSING TASK TO DO?

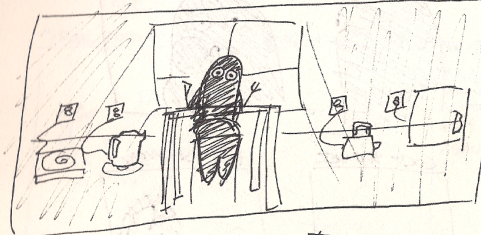
→ WALKING INTO ROOMS TRIGGER TASKS?

→ CHOOSE A TASK TO ACTIVATE?

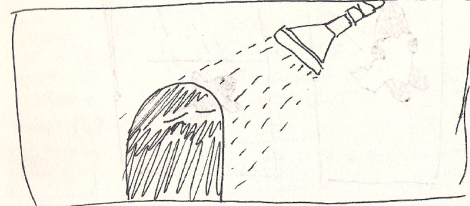
BEDROOM

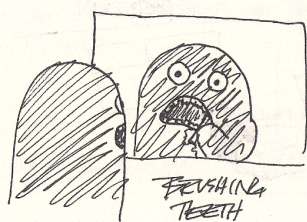


KITCHEN



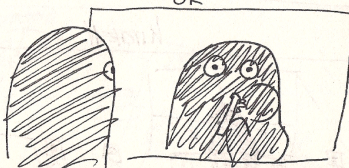
BATHROOM





BRUSHING
TEETH

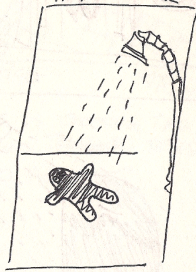
OR



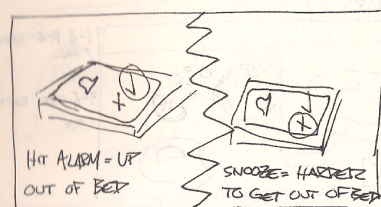
COLD SHOWER



HOT SHOWER



LEVEL 1. WAKE UP & GET OUT OF BED PART 1



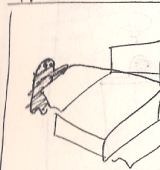
HIT ALARM = UP
OUT OF BED



SNOOZE = HARDER
TO GET OUT OF BED

PART 2

"I FEEL RESTED"



"I NEED A NAP FROM WAKING UP"



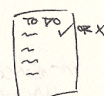
*ALARM
WILL
SOUND
OFF
AGAIN

HEAD START
IE ALREADY
OUT OF
BED +
MAKE BED

PASS

STUCK IN BED,
LET PLAYERS
STRUGGLE TO
GET OUT

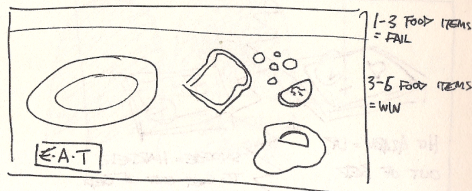
FAIL



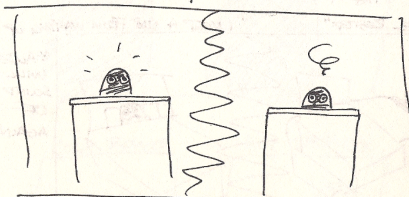
OR X

LEVEL 2. MAKE FOOD & EAT

PART 1



PART 2



ENERGIZED,
EATS HAPPILY

[PASS]

PLAYER'S STRUGGLE
TO FEED, POSSIBLY
FINISH FOOD

[FAIL]

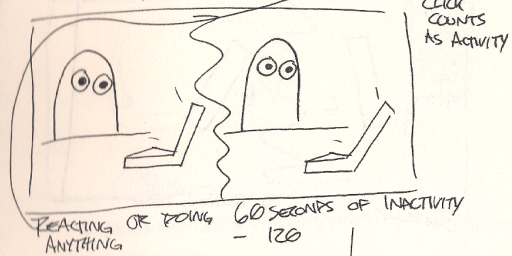
* EACH OUTCOME
HAS AN ENDING
SCREEN OF
DIALOGUE

PASS
I FEEL
ENERGIZED

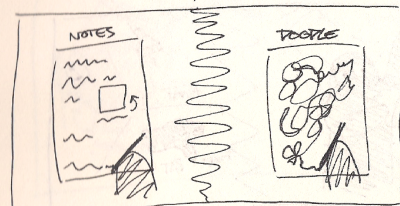
FAIL
I FEEL
SICK

LEVEL 3. TO WORK

PART 1



PART 2



TAKE MEETING
NOTES W/CURSOR

[PASS]

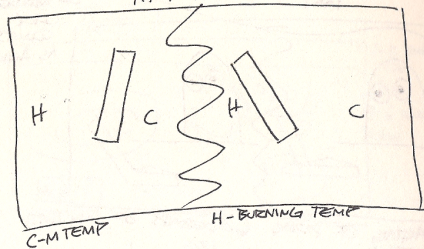
TOOLES W/CURSOR

[FAIL]

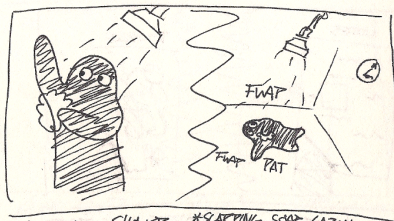
* BETWEEN EACH LEVEL ALLOW
FOR EXPLORATION. BEFORE THE
START OF EACH LEVEL ALLOW THE
PLAYER TO LOOK AROUND THE SPACE

LEVEL 4. SHOWER

PART 1



PART 2



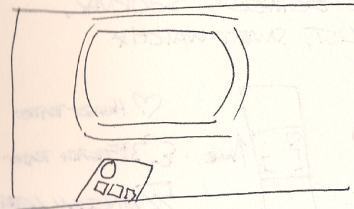
NORMAL SHOWER
(WHIZZING) (MUSIC)

PASS

*SLAPPING SCAP LABILY ON
MELTING INTO THE
SHOWER

FAIL

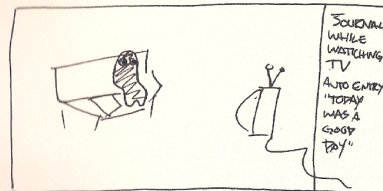
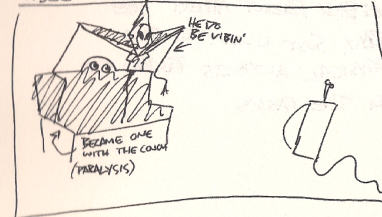
LEVEL 5. ENJOY AN ACTIVITY



CHOOSE
CHANNEL,
POSITION
DOESN'T
MATTER

- MECH. TO CHECK GOOD/BAD END CONDITIONS.

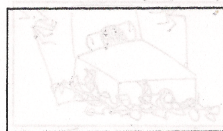
*SEE PREVIOUS PREDICTION



*REFER
TO OTHER
PREDICTION

MILENA S
LAVISA

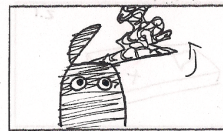
IN MY HEAD • DREAM SEQUENCE (CONTEXT) • CUTSCENE



FADE IN FROM WHITE



"A LOT HAS BEEN GOING ON IN MY HEAD"



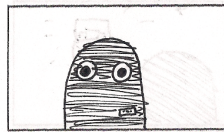
"... IN MY HEAD EXISTS SOMETHING SOMEONE TRYING TO CONSUME ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT..."



"IT WEIGHS ME DOWN AND REALIZES ME ALIVE ITS TRYING TO SUPPORT ITSELF..."



"SOMETIMES ITS ALMOST COMFORTING TO GIVE IN TO THE NUMBNESS"



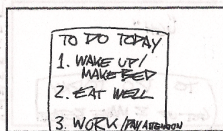
"I KNOW ITS NOT GOOD FOR ME TO FEEL LIKE THIS"



"IM TRYING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT"



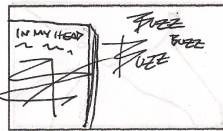
"MY THERAPIST HANDED ME A RED JOURNAL TO WRITE MY THOUGHTS IN"



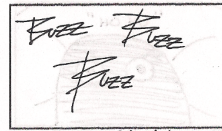
TO DO TODAY
1. WAKE UP / WAKE UP
2. EAT WELL
3. WORK / WORK
"THEY TOLD ME TO MAKE A CHECKLIST OF 3 THINGS I WANT TO COMPLETE DAILY"



"I TRY MY BEST TO DOCUMENT WHAT IS GOING ON IN MY HEAD"



"SOMETIMES ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS"



"HUH? WHAT? NO! ALREADY?! I SPENT ALL NIGHT THINKING ABOUT EVERYTHING I HAVE TO DO... I SHOULD GET UP..."

*PHONE ALARM TO WAKE UP.

*SLOW, CALMING BUT DISCOMFORTED MUSIC TO INDICATE A DREAM STATE. TRANSITION TO A MORE ANXIOUS MUSIC THAT USES THE PHONE BUZZ

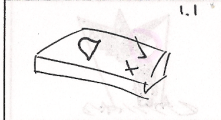
ANYONE ELSE GET ANXIOUS HEARING THEIR ALARM?

GEN/13A

* THE ANXIUS MUSIC CONTINUES TO PLAY UNTIL PLAYER SELECTS AN OPTION,
IF PLAYERS CHOOSE TO SNOOZE THE SAME MUSIC WILL PLAY THROUGH
THE CUTSCENE WITH MINOR CHANGES. IF PLAYERS CHOOSE TO WAKE
UP ON TIME THE MUSIC SHIFTS TO SOFT LO-FI WITH BIRDS CHIRPING

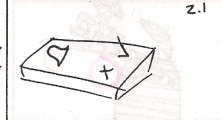
IN MY HEAD - LVL 1 "WAKE UP"

PLAYABLE



- TURN OFF ALARM AND
GET UP TO MAKE BED -
PASS CONDITION

PLAYABLE



- SNOOZE ALARM AND
STAY IN BED GREGGYY -
FAIL CONDITION

PLAYABLE



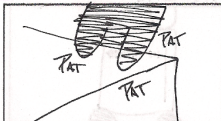
- HEAD STIFF, OUT AND MAKING
BED -

PLAYABLE



- LITERALLY STUCK IN BED,
GETS WRAPPED IN BLANKET
BURIED BY BURNOUT MONSTER

P
A
S
S
C
O
N
D
I
T
I
O
N



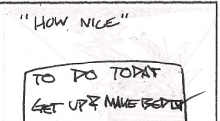
- FINAL TOUCHES -



- ADMIRE YOUR HARD WORK -



"THAT WASN'T SO BAD..."



"HOW NICE"

TO DO TODAY
GET UP & MAKE BED
PASS 1/5

NOTE
PLAYERS
CAN FAIL
OR PASS
ANY OF
THE 5
AND WILL
BE REPEATED
DURING
THIS TIME

F
A
I
L
C
O
N
D
I
T
I
O
N



"UH OH"

- SNOOZED ONE TOO
MANY TIMES -

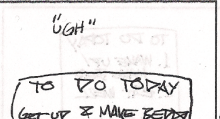


- BURNOUT MONSTER
WRAPPING THINGS UP
FOR THIS LEVEL -
PUN INTENDED



"AW SHIT"

- BLANKET BURIED -




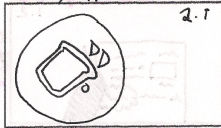


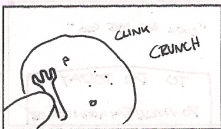


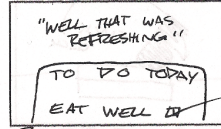
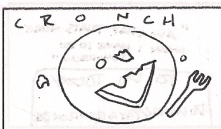


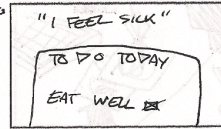
"UGH"

TO DO TODAY
GET UP & MAKE BED
FAIL 1/5

OR
IT WILL
JUST SHOW
VOR X
WITH SUT
THAT ONE
TASK SHOWN
ON SCREEN

*RETURN TO PLAYABLE AREA

LEVEL 1A * MODERATELY PACED SONG PLAYS USING KITCHEN APPLIANCE SOUNDS (i.e. KETTLE, TOASTER, ETC), IF PLAYERS DON'T EAT ENOUGH THE MUSIC GETS SLOW AND GROGGY, IF THEY DO IT BECOMES TIPPY.

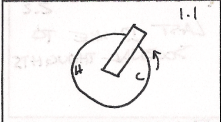
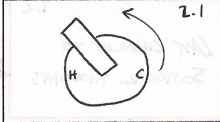

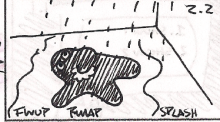
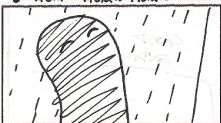
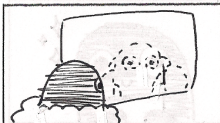

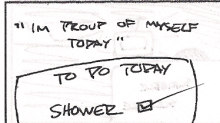
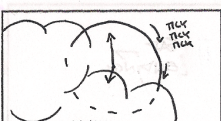
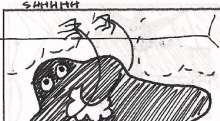



IN MY HEAD - LVL 2 "FUEL UP"				3
PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	
 <p>1.1</p> <p>- 3-6 ITEMS OF FOOD GIVE YOU ENERGY -</p> <p>PASS CONDITION</p>	 <p>2.1</p> <p>- 1-3 ITEMS OF FOOD KEEP YOU FEELING GROGGY -</p> <p>FAIL CONDITION</p>	 <p>1.2</p> <p>- EATS FOOD HAPPILY FEELING GOOD -</p>	 <p>2.2</p> <p>- STRUGGLES TO FINISH FOOD -</p>	
<p>R</p>  <p>1.3</p> <p>- DONE EATING -</p>	<p>R</p>  <p>2.3</p> <p>- WASH IT DOWN -</p>	<p>R</p>  <p>1.4</p> <p>- CLEAN UP -</p>	<p>R</p>  <p>2.4</p> <p>"WELL THAT WAS REFRESHING"</p> <p>TO DO TODAY</p> <p>EAT WELL</p> <p>PASS 2/5</p>	
<p>F</p>  <p>1.5</p> <p>- NO APPETITE -</p>	<p>F</p>  <p>2.5</p> <p>- DUMPING DRINK -</p>	<p>F</p>  <p>1.6</p> <p>- MOVING ON BUT NOT FEELING GOOD -</p>	<p>F</p>  <p>2.6</p> <p>"I FEEL SICK"</p> <p>TO DO TODAY</p> <p>EAT WELL</p> <p>FAIL 2/5</p>	

* THIS LEVEL WILL ONLY HAVE AMBIENT HOME NOISES AS WHEN YOU IN A CLASS OR MEETING ONLINE YOU "SHOULD" BE PAYING ATTENTION, MUMBLING FROM MEETING MAY BE HEARD

↑ FEELING LIKE THIS RN AS
I DO THIS LOL :D

LEN/ISA

* ASIDE FROM WATER/SHOWER SOUNDS, A DISCOMBOLATED "POOL-LIKE" TRACK PLAYS, IF PLAYERS CHOOSE A 'HOT' SHOWER THE AUDIO WILL BE TROWING OUT AND UNDERWATER NOISES WILL PLAY WITH THE TRACK SOFT IN THE BACKGROUND

IN MY HEAD • LVL 4 "WASH THE DAY OFF"				5
PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	PLAYABLE	
 <p>1.1</p> <p>- TAKING A WARM SHOWER -</p> <p>- PASS CONDITION</p>	<p>OR</p>  <p>2.1</p> <p>- TAKING A HOT SHOWER -</p> <p>- PASS FAIL CONDITION</p>	 <p>1.2</p> <p>- FRESHEN'N UP -</p>	 <p>2.2</p> <p>- WASTING TIME IN THE WARM WATER -</p>	
<p>♪ Hum ~ Hum ~ Hum ~</p>  <p>- DEEP BREATH -</p>	 <p>- MIRROR REFLECTION</p> <p>- INTROSPECTION -</p>	<p>HUM ~ HUM ~</p>  <p>- SQUEAKY CLEAN -</p> <p>- WHOLESOME ♡ -</p>	<p>"I'M PROUD OF MYSELF TODAY"</p>  <p>- TO DO TODAY</p> <p>- SHOWER</p> <p>- PASS</p>	
<p>SHHHHHH</p>  <p>- WASTING WATER -</p>	<p>SHHHHHH</p>  <p>- OH BOY -</p>	<p>GURGLE BUBBLE</p>  <p>- OVERTHINKING IN THE SHOWER -</p>	<p>BURBLE SWOOSH</p>  <p>- GOING UNDER -</p>	<p>STILL HAS LOOTS</p>
			 <p>- TO DO TODAY</p> <p>- DAILY HYGIENE</p> <p>- OR JUST "SHOWER"</p> <p>- FAIL</p>	

GENISA

*WEIRD LOFI PLAYS BUT IS AN UNDERTONE TO THE TV NOISES
 *BENUSK THE 2 PASS OPTION SHOWS WILL BE A REMENTION OF 2 OF MY PREVIOUS WORKS

IN MY HEAD - LVL 5 "ENJOY" / "TIME" / "DOWNTIME"				6				
THERE ARE 4 PROGRAMS TO CHOOSE FROM, 2 PASS, 2 FAIL	PLAYABLE		PLAYABLE		PLAYABLE		PLAYABLE	
	1.1 1. SHOW 1 2. SHOW 2		2.1 1. NEWS 2. COMMERCIAL		1.2 LAST CHANCE TO JOURNAL THOUGHTS		2.2 LAST CHANCE TO JOURNAL THOUGHTS	
	-CHOOSING SHOW TO ENJOY-		-CHOOSING SHOW TO ENJOY-		-PROMPT FUNCTION-		-PROMPT FUNCTION-	
	PASS CONDITION		FAIL CONDITION					
	TV PLAYING							
	GOOD END CUT		GOOD END CUT		GOOD END CUT		GOOD END CUT	
BAD END CUT	TV PLAYING							
	-WRITING IN JOURNAL-		-FEELIN' GOOD ABOUT THE DAY-		-FEELING PROUD AND ACCOMPLISHED-		END	
	TV PLAYING							
	-DOZING OFF-		-BECOMING ONE WITH THE COUCH-		-NOT ENJOYING THE DOWN TIME - - BURNOUT ENJOYING YOU AS A SEAT-		END	
	BAD END CUT		BAD END CUT		BAD END CUT		BAD END CUT	

APPENDIX D: OVER TIME

With the aforementioned overarching irony of running out of time to the crunch of completing this thesis a portion of content was cut for the following reasons:

- Gameplay Length Considerations
 - How long does it need to be to tell the story?
 - How long should it be to accommodate more than one player?
 - How long should it be for the exhibition?
- Technical Inabilities
 - What softwares can be used to create the project?
 - What tech is needed to create the project?
 - What skill level is required to execute certain elements between iterations?
- Narrative Executions
 - How may the narrative need to be changed over iterations?
 - How much text can fit throughout the different forms of media?

Throughout the process of development and playtesting there was a consensus that this project made more sense as a webcomic format with minor interactions rather than leaning towards something more cinematic and detailed as was originally planned.

REMOVED CONTENT

Alpha Iteration:

- 1 video page removed for brevity

Beta Iteration:

- 1 interaction removed
 - Former Page 9, checking emails and browsing the web
 - Converted to comic page due to technical issues in game engine

Final Iteration:

- 1 additional interaction removed
 - March's morning routine with drag and drop elements removed due to time-consumption for non-relevant assets (i.e 6+ sprite changes depending on the drag and drop conditions that were not intrinsic to the story)
- 2 animations removed and converted to comic pages based on feedback and skill level conflicts for more complex video editing

FINAL ITERATION

A link to the digital story landing can be found here: [OVER TIME Itch Landing](#).

Interactive Narrative Sequence Breakdown & Assets:

STARTING PAGE

ACT 1

Page 1 - Comic - Intro to Fractured Haze

Page 2 - Comic - Intro to March

Page 3 - Comic - The World

Page 4 - Comic - Water Cooler

Page 5 - Interaction - The Printer Room

- Background & Idle Sprite
- Printer on Fire
- Fixed Printer
- Filing Cabinet
- Document Video 1, 2
- Leave Room Transition

ACT 2

Page 6 - Comic - Office Life

Page 7 - Comic - Promotion Rejection

Page 8 - Comic - Email Checking, Passing Time

ACT 3

Page 9 - Comic - Locked in office

Page 10 - Comic - Hysteria

Page 11 - Comic - Hysteria

Page 12 - Comic - Floating in the Void

ACT 4

Page 13 - Interaction - Floating in the Void

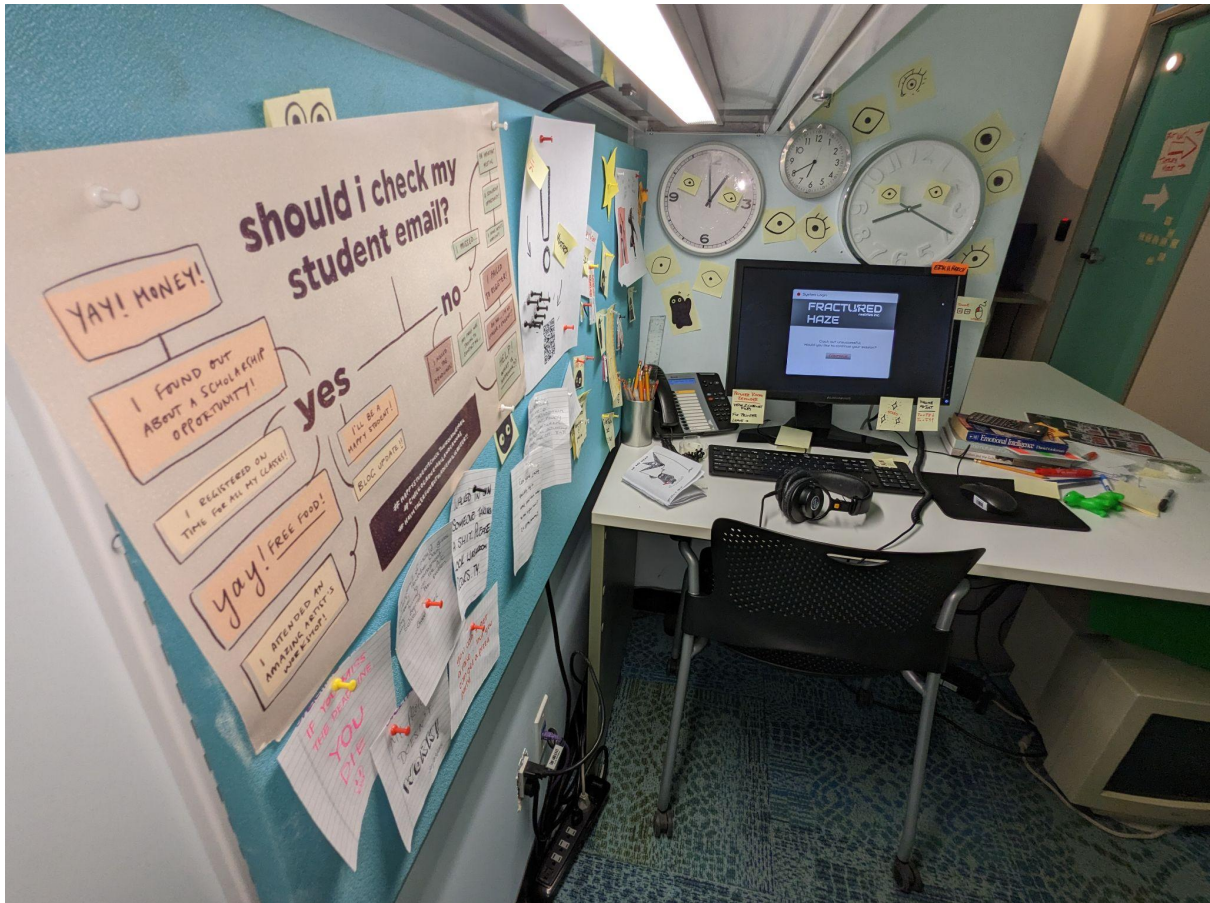
- Background & Idle Sprite
- Memory Star 1, 2, 3
- Memory Video 1, 2, 3
- Leaving the Void Transition

Page 14 - Comic - Morning Routine

Page 15 - Video - The Future

APPENDIX E: OVER TIME Exhibition

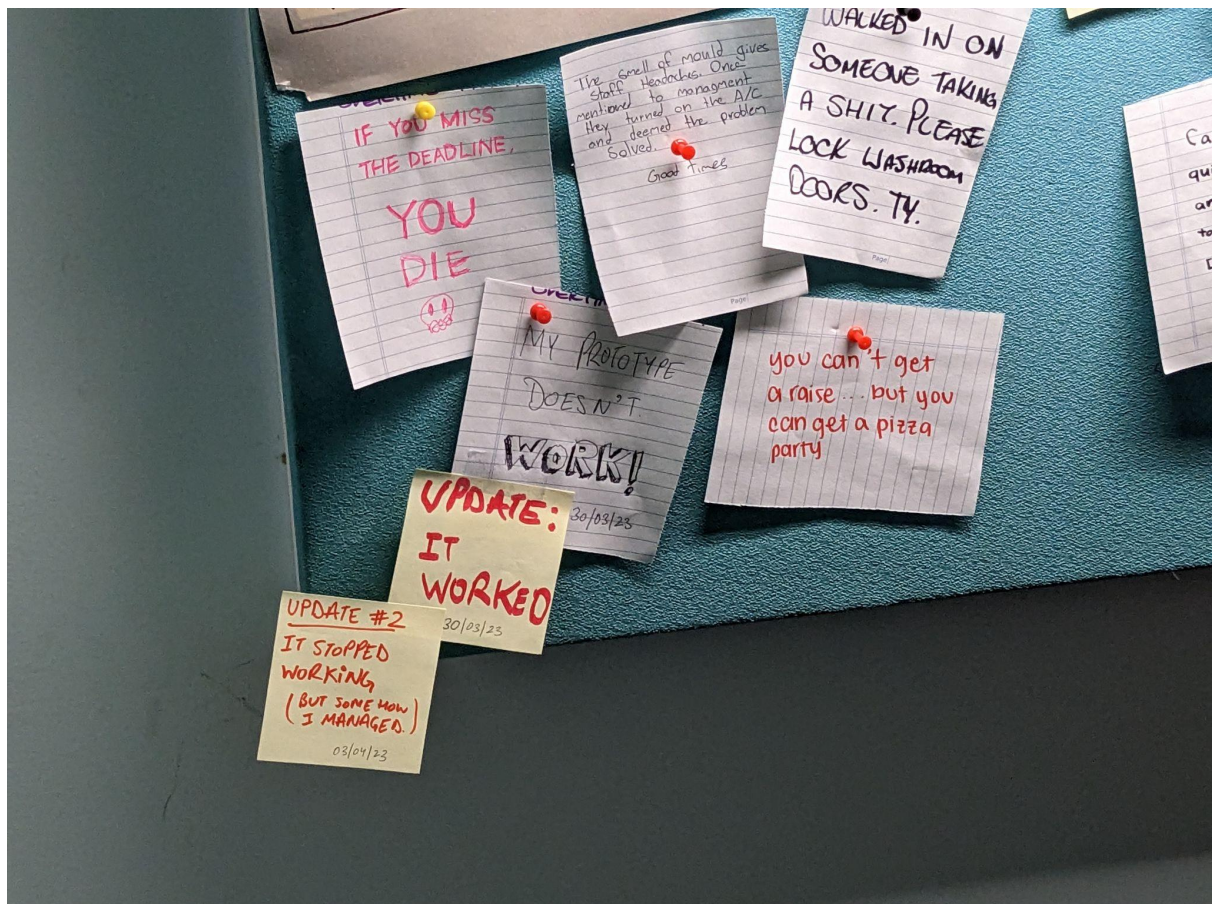
Final Documentation as seen at OCADU's Digital Futures Graduate Exhibition:
ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY.



Final Install of OVER TIME.



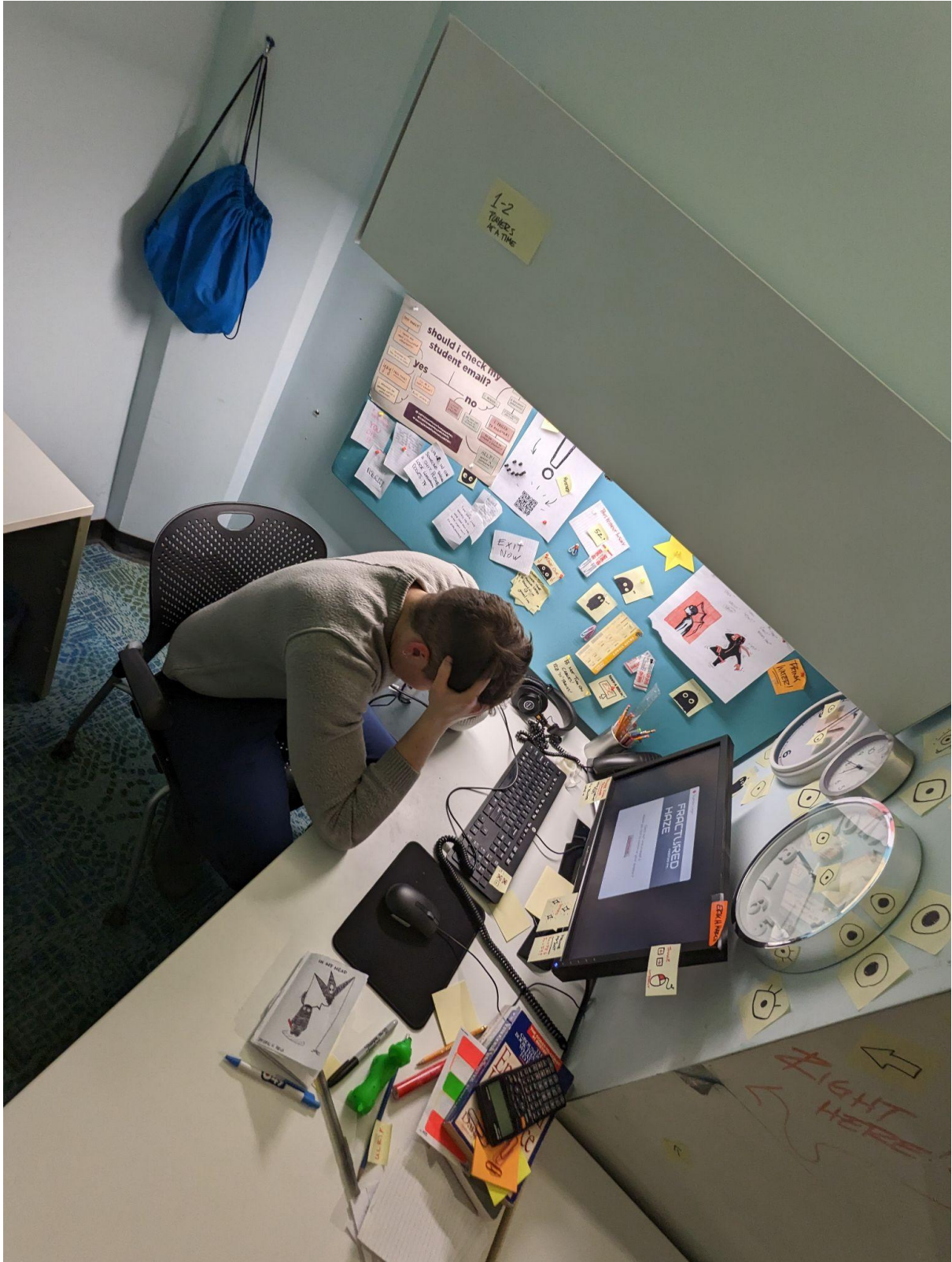
OVER TIME as seen when not in use/between exhibition days.



During opening night, players had the option to leave a note on an experience they had at work and post it on the board.



Side view of office space.



One of March's replacements, stressed at work.