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THE PLAGUE

JACK BRONSWIJK
2022



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Pre-Visualisation of Visual Allegory:

**Adapting a Classic Novel to Film for a Modern Audience Through the Lens of
Mid-Twentieth-Century Existentialism**

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| ABSTRACT

Philosophical discourse, even of ubiquitous human questions, is often restricted to academic circles due to its jargon and largely abstract nature, however the use of entertainment is an effective method of conveying complex ideas to a general audience. The use of allegory in entertainment media, such as literature and film, are attempts to simplify complex philosophical thinking by providing tangible examples in the form of stories; something human beings have been utilising for the passing on of knowledge since time immemorial.

One such example is French existentialist author Albert Camus' novel *The Plague* (Camus, 1947) which explores human desire for individual purpose, and one's relationship with their own inevitable death, through an allegorical story of a community experiencing a pandemic. There are however, no set rules on how to include such symbolism and allegory in stories. The central obstacle of any writer, artist, or designer is therefore how to most effectively convey the symbolic purpose of characters, settings, and situations to support the central themes and impart the intended message. This dilemma is mirrored in a central problem existentialist philosophy explores which is that of finding purpose within an inherently meaningless universe. Another French existentialist thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980),

posed that in a meaningless world "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 1946, p.20) – that one is not defined by the categories they fall into at birth but rather is tasked with constructing their own identity through action. This notion of definition through action lends itself well to visually communicating complex allegory in film. The intention of this project is to understand the use of allegory in visual art, through the lens of mid-twentieth-century existentialist philosophy, and incorporate these techniques into a practical framework for designing key scenes illustrations and conceptual design work to pre-visualize a film adaptation of a novel. This project demonstrates that the meaningful interaction of subjects, and contextualization of elements, heightens the visual storytelling, and allegorical potential, of the pre-visualization process by adapting the story, and underlying philosophical discussion, of Camus' *The Plague* to film for a modern audience.

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Fig. 002 The City of Oran. Bronswijk. J. (2022)

| 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Search for Meaning

Human civilization is one of story-tellers. Every culture in recorded history built a foundation of fictionalised stories as a means to preserve its past, explain life's greatest mysteries, or teach one how to live a good life. This fact has resulted in a vast tapestry of interconnected, ever-evolving realms of myth, legend, and folk-lore and cemented fiction as a tool to discuss niche or abstract ideas with a general audience. Stories achieve this through the use of allegory and symbolism which story-tellers employ in their work when exploring existentialist questions highlighted in times of communal crisis. The on-going global COVID-19 pandemic has made clear people's need for purpose by highlighting the detrimental effect taking away one's ability to tangibly interact with the outside world can have on one's mental health and sense of being (Mayer, 2021). Discussions surrounding how one finds meaning in their life are not new however, seeing a notable surge in France after the crisis of the Second World War. This spawned a generation of existentialist thinkers, including Albert Camus who utilises a pandemic story in his novel *The Plague* (Camus, 1947) as an allegory to discuss human desire for purpose and our relationship with the inevitably of death.

A person's drive for meaning is the primary motivation in their lives and is something one will place above wealth, power, security, and even one's own comfort and happiness (Frankl, 1946). One's life purpose has historically been satisfied with the devotion to a religious doctrine with the end goal of a desirable afterlife - simultaneously solving our inborn fear of death. The upheaval of traditional power structures through the revolutions and wars of the 20th century saw a dramatic shift toward a political view of one's purpose as merely a component of the larger state they were a part of (Frankl, 1946).

Unquestioning subscription to strict religious or political systems of belief has declined in much of contemporary society with the widespread rise of secularism and independent thought often attributed to greater access to information and the free exchange of ideas on a truly global scale through technology such as the internet (Mayer, 2021). Foreseen by philosophers such as Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Frankl (1905-1997), the move away from such ingrained institutions has resulted in the propagation of a physiological phenomena known as the 'existential vacuum' which describes the inability to find or create meaning in one's life (Frankl, 1946). This phenomena is defined by feelings of emptiness, futility, and a general aimlessness in one's life and the world they inhabit.

Existentialist commentators consider this widespread adoption of a nihilistic worldview to be the single defining ailment of our age and directly linked to the noted rise in mental illness in developed nations (Peters, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered many people's daily routines by having them work remotely from home or lose their job all together. This inability to engage meaningfully with the outside world has driven people to experience the existential vacuum more deeply, highlighting the need to feel as if their lives serve an impactful purpose within society (Mayer, 2021).



1.2 The Purpose of Stories

It is this ingrained desire for meaning that drives our collective fascination with fictional stories (Wolf, 2014). Stories as an artform serve to place the audience in the role of someone else. They allow one to accomplish greater deeds and take part in more intense experiences than one could in the mundanity of the real world. The question then may be asked why one would find that same enjoyment experiencing the stories of characters in situations antithetical to conventional definitions of happiness such as a survivor in a zombie apocalypse or a combatant in a traumatic warzone? One thing these types of stories

do add to the lives of the audience that they may be lacking is a clear sense of purpose. It is particularly stories of hardship that introduce a tension in the character's lives that they must overcome. It is in working to overcome this tension that allows a character to focus their entire being towards a singular goal, imbuing every action with a sense of meaning and bringing order to the world around them. For the majority of people, our developed world has stripped the basic survival tensions of locating food, shelter, and security out of our daily lives and replaced it with a monotonous routine. What the COVID-19 pandemic has done



Fig. 003. History of Stories. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

is robbed people of the self-imposed tensions of their respective jobs and responsibilities, highlighting this monotony and the need to feel as if their lives have meaning (Mayer, 2021).

It is within these captivating stories that one is able to find moral and philosophical messages to apply to one's own life. The 'nudge theory' is a concept in behavioural science that suggests positive social reinforcement can influence compliance with a set of ideas (Peters, 2020). This is often more effective in imparting a message or

set of beliefs than traditional education, legislation, or forceful policing. When used with subtlety and intention, allegorical stories engage with this same psychological phenomena, and can play an effective role in shaping behaviour.

1.3 Project Aims

This research study explores examples of allegory in film through the lens of existentialist philosophy and utilises concept design as a tool to demonstrate the technique's efficacy. The aim of this exercise is to understand the medium's ability to conduct existential discussion in order to bring abstract philosophical discourse of ubiquitous human questions out of purely academic circles by translating its jargon into a visual language for a general audience. This takes the form of pre-visualising a film adaptation of Camus' novel *The Plague* for a modern audience and translating its message to a visual medium.

1.3.1 Central Research Question:

How can mid-twentieth-century existentialist philosophy inform the design process to heighten the visual story-telling of key scene illustrations when pre-visualizing a film adaptation of a classic novel's story and allegory for a modern audience?

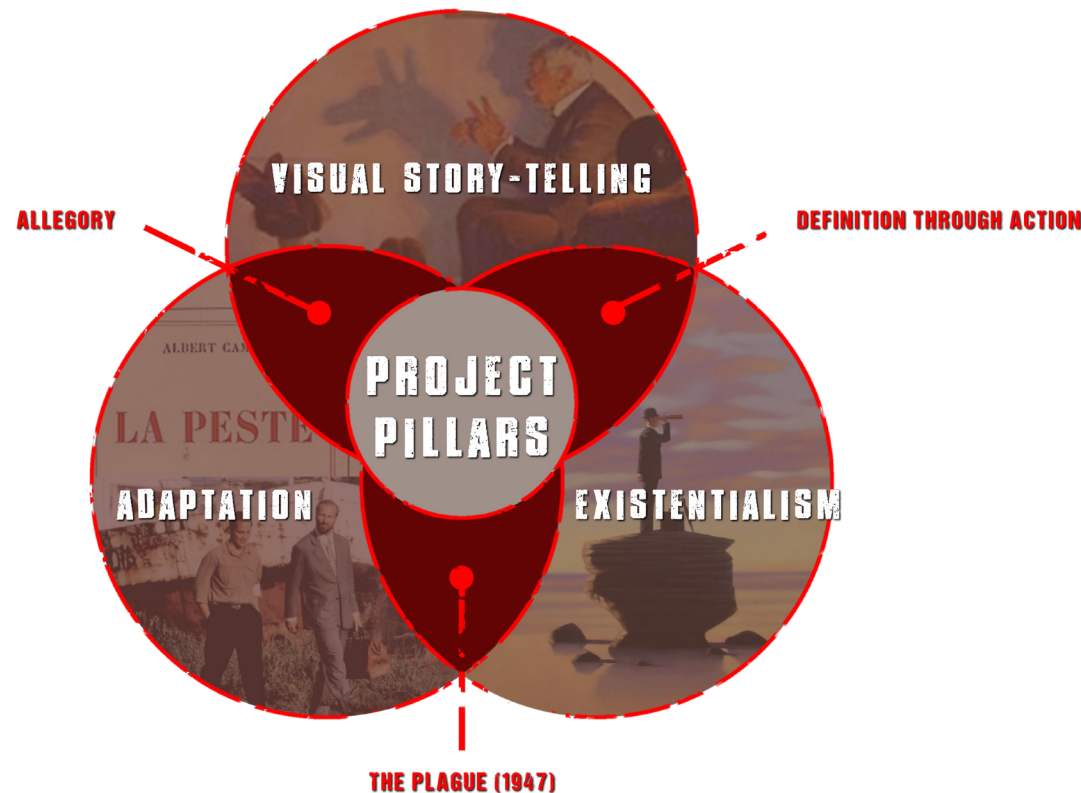


Fig. 004. Project Overview. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

1.4 Source Material

The story of *The Plague* is told from the perspective of Dr. Bernard Rieux as he ceaselessly, yet futilely, fights against an outbreak of bubonic plague in the French Algerian port city of Oran. The novel begins with the quiet contentment of the people being disrupted by the appearance of thousands of dead rats in the streets each morning who all but Dr. Rieux are fine with ignoring at first. Once people begin dying of a mysterious illness, a plague is declared and the city is placed under quarantine, violently preventing anyone from leaving, inciting a general panic.

The novel then goes on to chronicle how various characters react to these new circumstances through Dr. Rieux's eyes. An influential priest, Father Paneloux, uses the pandemic to advance his own agenda by declaring that the disease is an act of God, sent as punishment for the people's sins. This sees the people turn to religion in droves when they would not have done so under normal circumstances. Cottard, a criminal who attempts suicide at the beginning of the book to escape his past, becomes wealthy as part of the newly formed black market before going on a shooting spree when the disease subsides and the city is reopened. All the while, Jean Tarrou (a stranded tourist), Joseph Grand (a government employee), and Dr. Rieux take whatever steps necessary to help curb the spread of the disease and treat the infected. After a year, when the disease finally does dissipate, the people of Oran go back to their quiet contentment seemingly having learnt nothing from the ordeal.

The novel serves as an allegory for Camus' response to contemporary existential philosophers of his time, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). This response

would later become a recognized branch of Existentialism in its own right, known as Absurdism. While both of these schools of thought see the inherent meaninglessness of the universe as a self-evident truth, the main divergence lies in that Existentialism centres around the self creation of one's meaning, whereas Absurdism teaches that purpose is ultimately unobtainable and urges one to embrace the meaninglessness of life by rebelling against nihilism and living life to its fullest. In *The Plague*, Camus personifies this fight through his character's reactions to an unstoppable pandemic.

As a setting, 1940s Oran provides interesting opportunity for the cinematic medium. Colonial French Algeria is a unique location and time period that is not common in popular media today. The historical ethnic, class, and religious demographics provide opportunity for conflict that mirrors such tensions in our current political landscape. The setting also holds symbolic value being a single point of civilization surrounded by the emptiness of a vast ocean and an inhospitable desert, allowing it to act as a microcosm implying its message applies to the wider world. It is this project's intention to portray the film in a noir art-house style to better support a contemplative and philosophical tone. The intention is also to shift the setting into speculative science-fiction based on analogue technology of the 1940s to allow for the justified use of symbolic imagery that does not break the audience's suspension of disbelief.

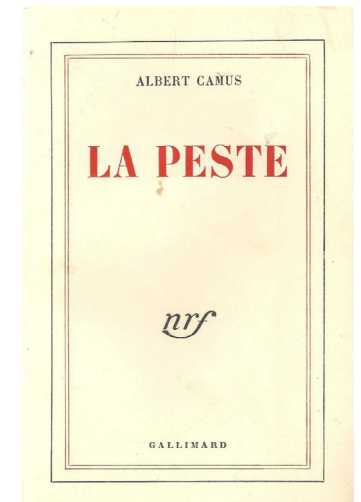


Fig. 005. First Edition *The Plague* Cover, Éditions Gallimard, (1947)

1.5 Role of the Designer

This project was undertaken from the perspective of a story and visual development artist with the responsibility of establishing the visual tone of the film and developing the alternate world it inhabits. Additionally, this process aimed to curate the communication of the story as a whole in such a way that it conveys the intended message, including establishing narrative devices to aid in communicating the allegory and symbolic imagery that visualise the underlying message.

A designer's role, on a fundamental level, is to arrange individually meaningless shapes, lines, and colours in such a way that it communicates a larger idea; to create meaning out of meaninglessness. This definition aligns with the core themes of Existentialism: that the universe is objectively meaningless and it is up to the individual to create their own meaning through action. It is this correlation that this project will express in the creation of practical concept design work.

In order to effectively communicate the allegorical discussion presented in *The Plague* it was necessary to engage with research that centred around historical examples of existentialist ideas being expressed in fiction, particularly successful examples of the philosophy's core themes being conveyed visually. This generated an understanding of the influences that inspired Camus, providing a clear picture of his intentions, and the subsequent media that he himself inspired in the time since the writing of *The Plague*.

| 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Existentialism

Since the birth of philosophy, it was widely accepted that all objects and ideas had a set of innate attributes, known as their 'essence', that defined them – a school of philosophy known as Essentialism. This thinking extended to human beings and their life's purpose which was derived from the circumstances of their birth and therefore unchanging.

A move away from this long held belief began in the 19th century, with the works of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) but did not become fully realised until after the Second World War in the 1940s with the establishment of Existentialism in France. Existentialist philosophy explores human's desire for their lives to feel purposeful, proposing that an individual's actions and decisions are solely responsible for deciding this purpose, not political or religious doctrine. A central problem outlined in existentialist thought is what is referred to as 'The Absurd' which describes the conflict between this innate human desire to find inherent meaning in life and the universe's objective meaninglessness. Albert Camus built upon this by declaring that one should confront the absurd condition of human existence and embrace it by "living without appeal" (Camus, 1942, p.53) - by declaring their own meaning and finding purpose in the pursuit alone.

2.2 Camus and The Absurd Allegory

Albert Camus opens his arguably most renowned work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, with the declaration that "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide" (Camus, 1942, p.1). What is evident from this claim, and a central theme in much of his work, is Camus' acute recognition that all lives must end one day and that it is this fact one must come to terms with before being able to devote their full attention anywhere else. It is the universality of this fact that drove Camus' fascination with how people have historically overcome nihilism and found meaning in life in light of its finite, and apparently meaningless, nature. What he identified are three categories of action that people take when faced with The Absurd. Each of these paths are embodied by one or more characters in *The Plague* which allows the audience to see the tangible results of the philosophical argument.

The first course of action people can take is to commit suicide. This self-inflicted premature death can be physical or philosophical, in the form of giving up any sense of meaning, and comes as a response to a nihilistic outlook on the world and one's place in it. Camus saw no honour or reason in this path as it avoids the question of meaning rather than answering it. This path is embodied in *The Plague* by the character Cottard, a criminal who attempts but fails to commit suicide at the beginning of the story to escape his past. He goes on to live in a state of constant paranoia, while simultaneously craving human connection. Cottard is the only character in the story who welcomes the plague as it reduces the rest of the population to his state of fear and loneliness. When the plague finally does dissipate, Cottard snaps and goes on a shooting spree rather than face this return to normality.

The second course of action Camus identifies is the subscription to an established political or religious doctrine, thereby outsourcing one's critical thinking and philosophical struggle to another. Camus claimed allowing another to prescribe your meaning again avoids the question as it circumvents the personal struggle required to find true personal fulfilment - something Camus labeled as 'philosophical suicide'. This path is embodied in the story by Father Paneloux, a priest who sees the plague as a punishment sent by God before dying after putting his full faith in his doctrine and refusing medical treatment.

The third path was the one Camus advocated, which is to take your own mortality into serious consideration and live life with the conscious acknowledgement that it is limited and therefore should be lived without reservation. This path sees one directly confront the absurdity of life by setting an ultimately unattainable goal for themselves to orient their life around and find purpose and fulfilment in the pursuit alone. This final path is demonstrated by *The Plague's* protagonist Dr. Rieux and his two colleagues Jean Tarrou and Joseph Grand. These three characters avoid nihilism by committing their full efforts every day to combat the relentless spread of the plague. While their efforts are ultimately futile, as one can never truly conquer death, they find purpose in the fight itself despite victory being unobtainable.



Fig. 006. Three Paths of The Absurd. Bronswijk, J. (2022)



Fig. 007. Portrait of Albert Camus. Cartier-Bresson, H. (1944)

2.3 Philosophy Through Fiction

A common method of passing on cultural wisdom in ancient civilisations, such as those of Greece and Egypt, were short stories in the form of poem or verse, which today we refer to as fables. A fable usually features anthropomorphized aspects of nature, such as talking animals or elemental forces, engaging in a short scenario that illustrates a certain moral message which is often stated outright at the end as a concise maxim. The ancient Greek story-teller Aesop (620 BCE - 564 BCE) was a prolific writer of fables, and the originator of many which are still in common use today such as the tale of *The Tortoise and the Hare* which teaches us that "slow and steady wins the race".

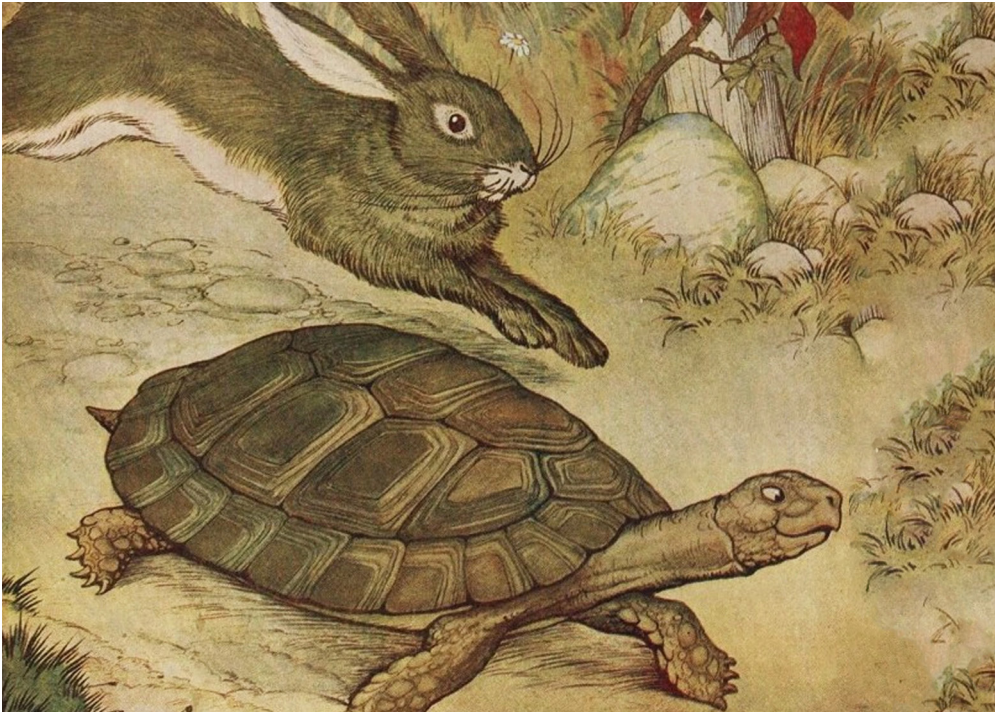


Fig. 008. *The Hare and the Tortoise*. Winter, M. (1919)

Fictional narratives are able to discuss such abstract ideas with a general audience through symbolic representation, known as allegory, under the guise of pure entertainment. The fictional work of existentialist philosophers has often been a more effective method of discussion than their explicitly instructive works. *The Plague*, by Camus, efficiently delineates his ideology into an emotionally engaging tale of a city battling an outbreak of the bubonic plague, forcing his characters to confront death directly and chronicling their reactions in line with his philosophy in order to provide tangible examples of its efficacy. The allegory being that the plague in this context is referring to a philosophical epidemic of unlived, unfulfilled, lives which is symbolised by physical sickness.

The sickness also symbolises the idea of one's own inevitable death - something one may tend not to dwell on but Camus here advocates to confront directly and consider when living one's life. In the current cinematic age however, discussion of these ubiquitous concepts would no longer reach the widest audience in the form of a novel, as more people turn to visual media to consume entertainment (Twenge, 2019). As a primarily visual medium, film has its own unique methods of incorporating allegory. By their nature, films are perspectival, and therefore help the viewer understand that there are other viewpoints outside of their own. This aids in conveying the meaning of a philosophy by displaying its behavioural implications in a more immersive way. Traditional literature, as a written medium, is limited in this way as it can only describe something that is then required to be interpreted by the audience through their own experiential bias. Film presents the world with greater substance and by reproducing it creates a more visceral platform for discussion.

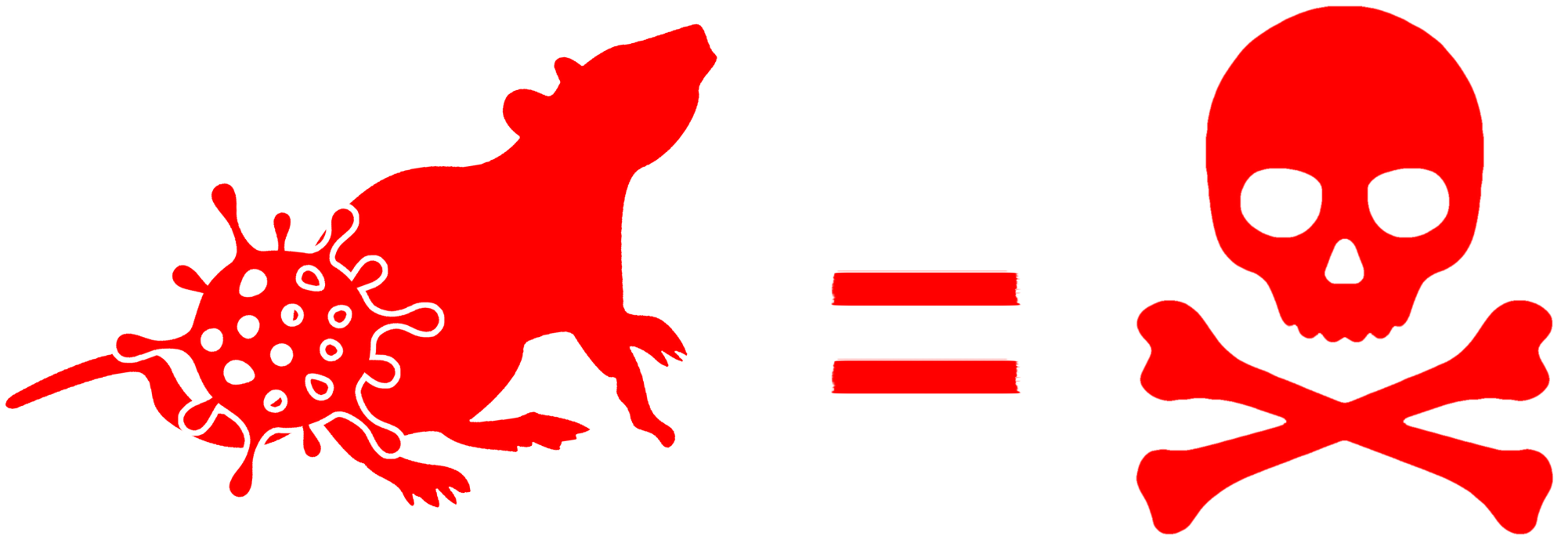


Fig. 009. Allegory. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 010. *Boy Meets Girl*. Carax, L. (1984)

2.4 Visualising The Absurd

This project drew on three primary sources for design inspiration: the *Cinéma Du Look* film movement, the filmography of director Terrence Malick, and the *Contemporary Realism* art movement. Each of these sources draw heavily on existentialist themes, with a continual referral back to the lived experience of the individual, not just in the stories being told but also in their technical communication. Despite this, more thorough exploration could be done incorporating these existentialist ideas, such as definition through action, into the pre-production design process itself - a gap that this project aims to explore.



Fig. 011. *Boy Meets Girl*. Carax, L. (1984)

2.4.1 Case Study 01: *Cinéma du Look*

The French film movement *Cinéma Du Look* (1981-1994) (Beineix, 1981; Carax, 1984; Besson, 1985) comprises only ten films, each exploring existential questions surrounding what it means to be alive which aligns with the themes explored in *The Plague*. These films discuss such ideas through heavily stylistic filmmaking techniques to better visually reflect the inner conflict of their characters whose struggles embody the central messages. Commonly utilising techniques such as strong washes of colour, impressionistic use of light, and gimmicky shots such as point-of-view, the movement aimed to push beyond contemporary expectations of the medium. Such emphasis on visual styling not only increases audience engagement (Twenge, 2019) but also abstracts the world in support of its underlying discussion.



Fig. 012. *Boy Meets Girl*. Carax, L. (1984)

An exemplary film of the movement is *Boy Meets Girl* (Carax, 1984) which tells a doomed love story between two existentially depressed teenagers over the course of a single evening. The film frames it's discussion around the adage that 'youth is wasted on the young', exploring the intellectualised boredom of the younger generation - the idea that young adults, trapped in their heads, arrogantly believe their lives to be fully lived already while lacking true longevity as a point of comparison. Intentionally shot in black and white, the film utilises a gentle haze which seemingly powders the faces, removing any blemishes and signs of age in order to highlight the youthful innocence in its characters. Likewise the camera moves with a soft grace, never drawing attention to itself with its slow pans and floating tracking shots. Most scenes are defined by a high contrast in tonal values providing a rich illumination of the characters while their

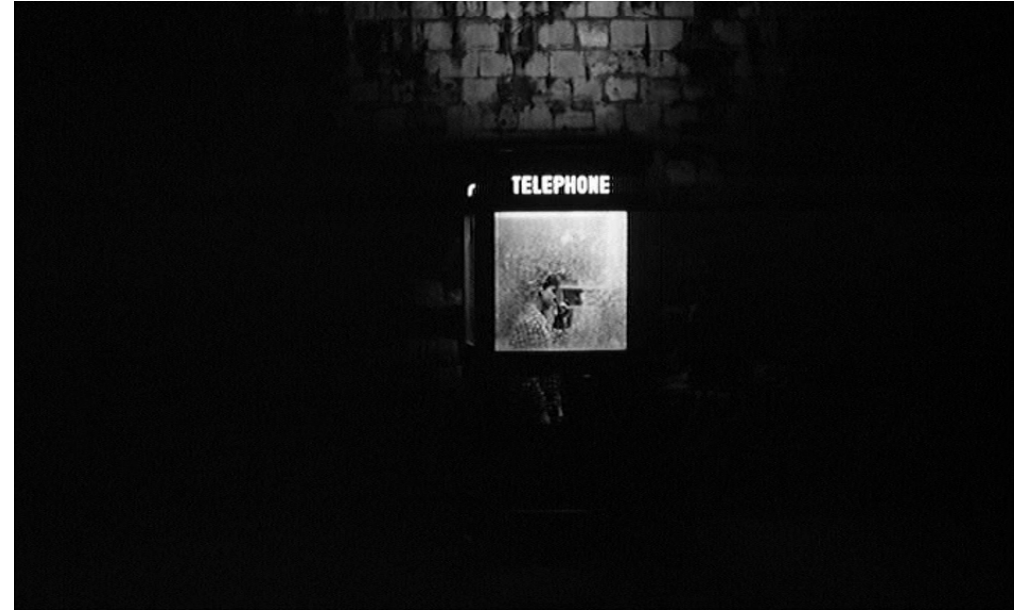


Fig. 013. *Boy Meets Girl*. Carax, L. (1984)

surroundings fade into blackness. This effect is both theatrical and self-aggrandizing - reflecting the character's egocentricity. The light is continuously fixed on the arrogant youths rather than the surrounding city of Paris - the 'city of light' itself neglected in darkness.

As an embodiment of French pop culture, the *Cinéma Du Look* film movement is a direct descendant of the cultural shifts the French existentialist school pioneered decades beforehand. While the core thematic discussion remains recognizable, the form of that discussion has been heavily influenced by the philosophy itself. It is this symbiotic relationship of medium and message that this project uses as a technical reference in the development of its key scene illustrations.

2.4.2 Case Study 02: Terrence Malick

Prior to dedicating his life to filmmaking, director Terrence Malick had aspirations of becoming a philosopher, earning a degree from Harvard before going on to attend Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar (Michaels, 2009). His filmography echoes this early passion in its recurring themes and visual execution which define an iconic style that has often been described as 'philosophical cinema' (Michaels, 2009). *After Days of Heaven* (Malick, 1978), Malick took a twenty year hiatus from filmmaking. Upon his directorial return with *The Thin Red Line* (Malick, 1998), Malick had seemingly abandoned the traditional Hollywood two-shots and conversational cut-betweens ubiquitous amongst his contemporaries in favour of a wandering wide-angle camera that circles subjects as they move through the film. This technique of filming gives scenes an ethereal, much more intimate, tone putting the audience in a state of calm and contemplation.

Another distinctive technique Malick employs in his film's philosophical discussion is the use of recurring symbolic motifs tied to specific ideas such as a snake representing deception or water and fire representing life and death respectively.

The Tree of Life (Malick, 2011) was the result of Malick's long desire to create "a history of the cosmos up through the formation of the Earth and the beginnings of life" (Plate, 2012). The film explores the origins and meaning of life through a man's childhood memories of his family living in 1950s Texas interspersed with imagery of the origins of the universe and the evolution of life on Earth. The film centres around strong philosophical and theological themes, setting up two paths of being which it dubs 'the way of nature' and 'the way of grace' represented by the father and mother respectively. The film poses questions such as: why should one follow 'the way of grace' if they still end up suffering and why should one be forgiving of a cruel and indifferent universe? The film offers no clear answers to these ontological questions but rather frames its discussion in such a way that each viewer may arrive at a unique perspective.

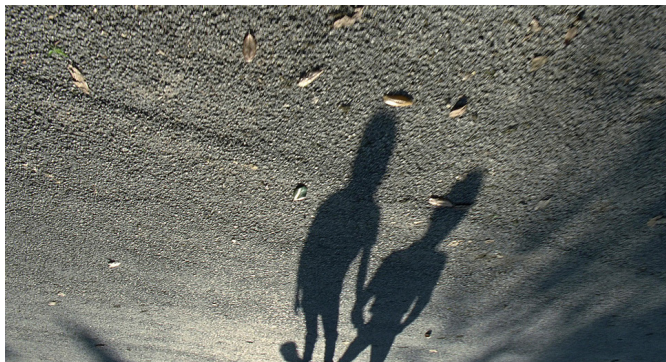


Fig. 014. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)



Fig. 015. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)



Fig. 016. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)

A distinctive technique Malick uses is point-of-view shots. When conveying Jack's childhood he does so from his perspective literally placing the camera behind Jack's eyes so the audience sees the world as he does. Malick takes this a step further and distorts the world in these quick flashes of memory, how young Jack would interpret it at a particular age; upstairs is a dark and mysterious place, new faces are large and frightening, colours, sounds, and touch are more intense, and through it all the mother takes on divine qualities as his guide and protector. Jumping forward in time Jack is an adult and stuck in a world following 'the way of nature,' the death of his brother, now decades past, still clearly weighing heavily on him. With very little words, Malick conveys this lost and confused state of being in Jack through dutch angles and a focus on extreme perspective intended to make the audience share in Jack's mind state.

In *The Tree of Life*, Malick leans heavily on a recurring motif prevalent throughout much of his work which is the fascination with water. Associated with 'the way of grace,' water is seen as the origin of

life as the water of the womb, while also possessing the power to take it away as it does Jack's brother. Throughout the film the audience is shown the older Jack walking, seemingly lost, through a desert; a place defined by its lack of water. He is a man trapped by 'the way of nature.' In the end it is only with the help of his brother that he is able to find water, thereby beginning on 'the path of grace.'

The work of Terrence Malick stands out in today's film landscape with its unconventional approach to story-telling and its tackling of deep philosophical themes. Its use of abstract imagery and recurring motifs to visually explore complex ideas was a key point of reference in the creation of this project's key scene illustrations.



Fig. 017. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)



Fig. 018. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)



Fig. 019. *The Tree of Life*. Malick, T. (2011)

2.4.3 Case Study 03: Contemporary Realism

Contemporary Realism as an art movement emerged in New York City in the 1970s as a push back against the prevalent *Abstract Expressionism* of the time (The Art Story, 2022). The movement saw a return to form replicating scenes from reality with high technical proficiency adhering to teachings of old masters of the 19th century *Impressionist* and *Realist* movements such as Sargent (1856-1925) and Hopper (1924-1967). This harkening back to tradition did not lack innovation however, with many of its modern trained artists injecting expressive use of colour and abstract sensibilities into their composition and brushstroke techniques. The goal of the movement can be summed up in the popular mantra 'real not ideal' as it upended the notion that it was art's duty to depict nature at its most perfect. Instead *Contemporary Realism* focuses on what is rather than what could be, aiding viewers in seeing the intrigue and fragile beauty of the everyday through simplicity and an absence of sentimentality. This intention is reflected in the popular subjects of the movement such as scenes of social gatherings, candid street scenes, and stark contemplative portraiture.

While early *Contemporary Realism* focused on depicting the entire image with a high degree of fidelity, recent takes on the movement incorporate greater expressionism, reserving detail for a primary focal area and allowing the rest of the canvas to fade into abstraction. This technique prioritises the holistic emotional read of the image while maintaining a clear idea of the subject. Such an approach draws on *Gestalt Psychology* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022) which is a school of thought that suggests human beings do not focus on individual components but rather tend to perceive objects and ideas as sums of their parts.

This can be translated to visual art by giving the viewer a point of high fidelity to ground them through which the abstraction of the rest of the image is given meaning in relation.



Fig. 020. Geisha portrait. Li, W. (2018)



Fig. 021. *Passengers*. Assael, S. (2008)

2.4.3.1 Contemporary Realism in Pre-Production

Core techniques and themes from this most recent phase in *Contemporary Realism* have seen prevalent use in modern conceptual design for the entertainment industry. As an industry centred around design iteration, not needing to render the entire image to photorealism affords a level of speed desirable particularly in the pitch and pre-production phases of larger projects such as blockbuster films and AAA video games. Whereas later production and post-production phases require more realised and diagrammatic conceptual design, it is within these early phases that the emotional core of the story and the overall tone of the project is explored through looser sketches, speed paintings, and mood concepts.

One designer in particular has embraced such techniques as part of their process for producing more engaging key scene mood concepts. Hyoung Nam is a senior concept artist at the video game development studio, *Naughty Dog*, whose work has contributed to cinematic, story-driven, game franchises such as *Uncharted* (2007) and *The Last of Us* (2013). Employing a loose brush technique reminiscent of that found in *Contemporary Realism*, Nam is able to generate a great sense of emotional atmosphere in his scenes, keeping focus on the story as finer details are able to be ignored in favour of a holistic read of the entire image. This workflow of beginning the visualisation process of a character by placing them in a story moment allows the designer to gain a better understanding of the character's personality and who they are as individuals thereby informing their appearance. This added depth in turn produces characters, environments, and story moments with greater verisimilitude that feel as if they exist outside of the immediate needs of their respective plot point.



Fig. 022. Jesse. Nam, H. (2016)



Fig. 023. Portrait 01. Nam, H. (2016)



Fig. 024. Portrait 02. Nam, H. (2016)

Another area of pre-production where the speed and expressive nature of *Contemporary Realism* finds success is when storyboarding cinematic sequences for films or games. Freelance story and visual development artist Dan Milligan incorporated just such techniques when producing storyboards and key frames for video games such as *The Division* (Massive Entertainment, 2016) and films such as *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2019).

A storyboard artist's job is to establish the composition and sequence of shots and how the camera moves between said shots for a motion picture with the end goal of telling the story visually. This process begins by establishing the narrative goal of the scene and the emotional beats needed to fulfil that goal. A first draft of any such sequence will undoubtedly be loose and rough, at times only legible to the artist themselves, but the mood and emotional core of each plot beat is paramount in solving the design problem of the larger scene. It is to this end that the tenets of *Contemporary Realism* can aid a

designer by keeping their work output quick and emotionally resonant. By not becoming bogged down in design details, and allowing a level of interpretation in relation to the focal element the designer chooses to render to a higher degree, a storyboard sequence can be produced at a faster rate while better informing mood and tone.

Production of this project's key scene illustrations, storyboard sequences, and accompanying design work will borrow heavily from the artistic style of *Contemporary Realism* and work processes of both Hyung Nam and Dan Milligan. Nam's style favours character driven emotional story-telling which will aid this project's work in better portraying the plot beats of the adaptation while being emotionally engaging and visually appealing. Referencing the work and techniques of Mulligan's quick and loose approach to storyboarding will help this project explore story moments more thoroughly by producing multiple emotion-driven interpretations at a faster rate.

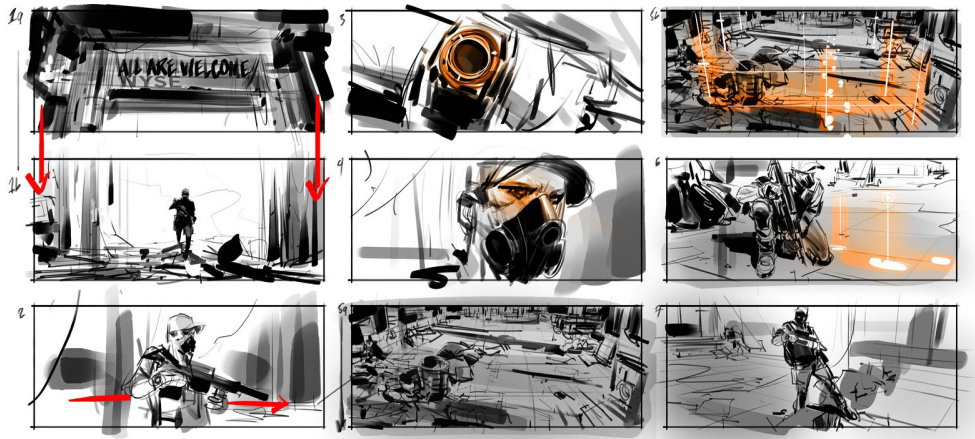


Fig. 025. *Black Panther* - Storyboards 01. Milligan, D. (2018)



Fig. 026. *Black Panther* - Storyboards 01. Milligan, D. (2018)

2.5 Transmedia Adaptation

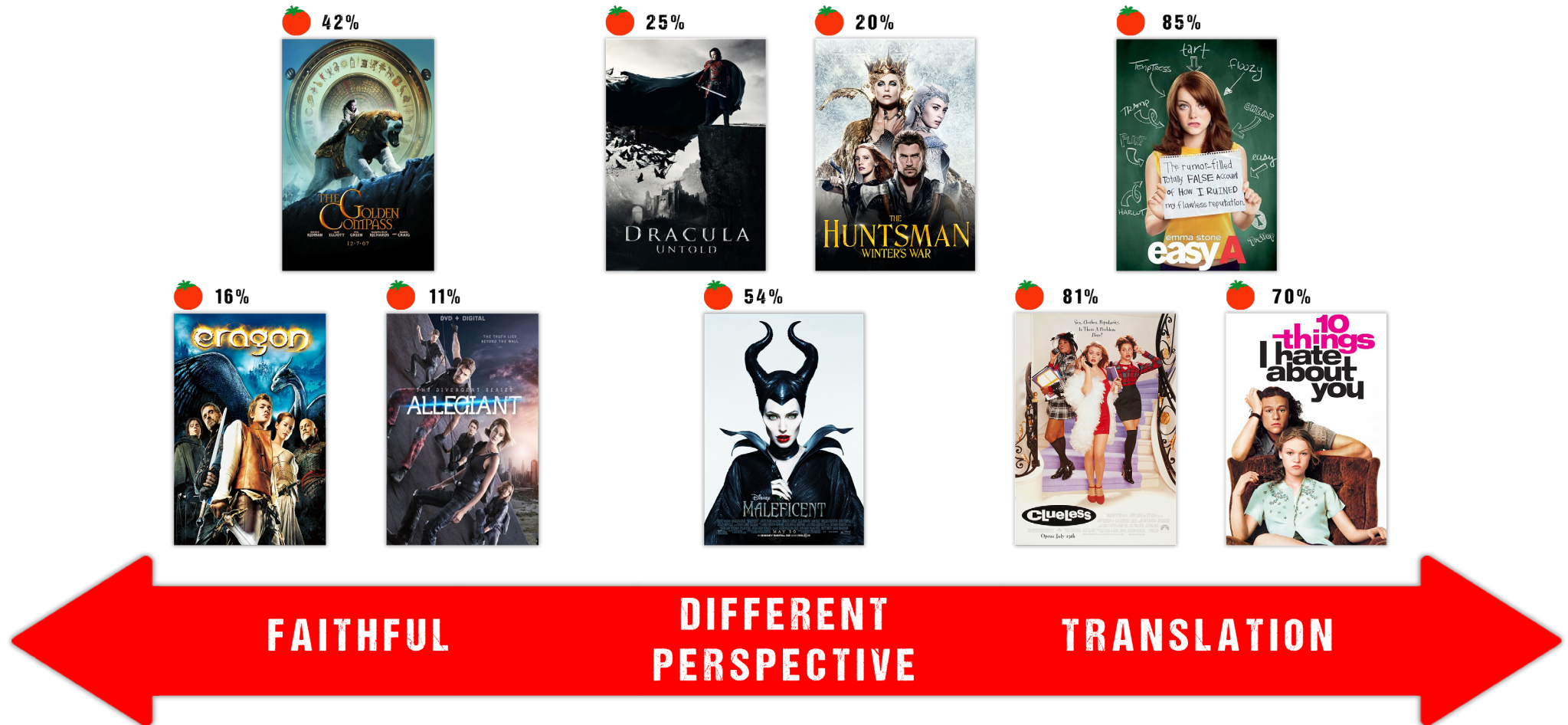


Fig. 027. Transmedial Adaptation. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

This research study has identified three methods of transmedial adaptation employed by filmmakers: faithful, different perspective, and translation.

2.5.1 Faithful Adaptation

The first method sees the filmmakers attempt to faithfully recreate the novel as it is described in the text and produces rare instances of commercial or critical success. This approach relies heavily on the success of the source material and its established fan base but often falls short of expectations as novels and films are fundamentally different media. A clear differentiating factor between the two media is the length of time they have to tell essentially the same story. This often results in the dilution of plot, character development, and message to only surface level interpretation. Another factor that separates text based media from visual media is the amount of information a reader is required to interpret through their own bias. This heavy reliance on audience interpretation results in countless personal versions of the source material. By bringing to life just one such variation much of the original fan base will inevitably be disappointed.

2.5.2 Shifted Perspective Adaptation

The second approach filmmakers may take when adapting a piece of written media is to build upon the same story by following a different perspective, thereby expanding the source material. This approach is evident in the recent trend of film releases from *Disney* who are reinterpreting many classic fairy tales from the perspective of the original villain such as Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty* (Reitherman, 1959) and Cruella from *101 Dalmations* (Reitherman, 1961). This does more than reproduce the source material as it reinterprets the original story through a different narrative. Where this method of adaptation runs into complications is its meta influence on the original source material and its established fan base. By repainting the

villain in a more sympathetic light, for example, the clear good versus evil dynamic of the source material is altered leading to potential upset amongst fans.

2.5.3 Translated Adaptation

The third method of adaptation identified was translating the source material of a written piece of media for a new audience by recontextualizing the original intentions behind the story in order to deliver the same message. The main benefit of this method is its divorce from the source material. By not presenting itself to be a direct reproduction of an established piece of media, this method largely avoids offending fans of the original. An example of such a translation is *Easy A's* (Segal, 2010) adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850). While the film pays homage to the original novel, it holds no pretence of being a direct interpretation but rather borrows themes and story elements to make the same central message more consumable by a different audience.

This project's adaptation of *The Plague* will follow the latter method identified and aim to stay true to the essence of the original allegorical discussion presented in the novel while updating its characters and world for a modern cinematic audience.

2.6 Alternate Worlds

Alternate worlds have been used as the setting for fiction since the earliest recorded stories and have become a staple of modern genres such as fantasy and science-fiction. By placing a story in an alternate world, a story-teller is tasked with setting up an internal logic that establishes the expectations of the audience so they understand the dangers and opportunities of the setting that may impact the characters and story.

This internal logic also sets the standard for the audience's suspension of disbelief. An audience may accept that a super hero is able to shoot heat rays from their eyes but will feel betrayed and lose investment in the story if those same heat rays can, without prompt, resurrect the dead for example - both concepts are equally implausible in reality but one has been given proper setup and has been established to make sense within the world it occupies (Wolf, 2014). This is the key difference between grounded science-fiction or fantasy media and surrealist or avant-garde media - the former takes the time to formulate a logic and set expectations for the imagery it deems necessary to communicate its message while the latter uses such imagery with little overt explanation and expects the audience to come to their own interpretation. The key advantage the proposed film adaptation of *The Plague* will gain from being shifted into an alternate world is this justified use of abstract imagery to communicate its allegory.

The primary advantage a story gains by physically representing its themes through abstract imagery is that it allows for characters to tangibly interact with the idea visually thereby providing evidence for the central message. It is through these character interactions that the

thematic discussion takes place. Human beings are also captivated by spectacle and awe-inspiring imagery. By setting a story in an alternate world a film can take greater advantage of this inherent attraction thereby increasing audience engagement. This is however typically dependent on the successful implementation of abstract imagery and how such imagery is interacted with.



Fig. 028. Superboy #87, DC Comics (1961)

2.6.1 How *Gattaca* utilises its Alternate World

A film that utilises an alternate world to great effect in service to its central discussion is the 1997 film *Gattaca* (Niccol, 1997) which sets its story in a near future neo-noir interpretation of California. The world the film establishes is one where genetic manipulation before birth is common practice, creating a societal rift between a newly formed upper class of genetic elite, known as Valids, and a lower class of those born naturally known as In-Valids. This central dilemma is supported by the film's production design which visualises the division between the two genetic classes. The genetic elite are continually presented with a sleek, ultra modern, minimalist aesthetic evoking a clean perfectionism but also a coldness reflective of those associated with it (Fig. 029). In juxtaposition, those born naturally are most associated with a dull and chaotic, yet self expressive, aesthetic (Fig. 030) reflecting the In-Valids comparative inferiority but also commenting on the creative individualism of human nature in stark contrast to the uniformity of the Valids. The In-Valids are also repeatedly associated with imagery of rubbish while the Valids are defined by their near obsession with cleanliness which is directly referenced at the beginning of the film with the common phrase "cleanliness is next to godliness".



Fig. 029. *Gattaca* - Valids. Niccol, A. (1997)



Fig. 030. *Gattaca* - In-Valids. Niccol, A. (1997)

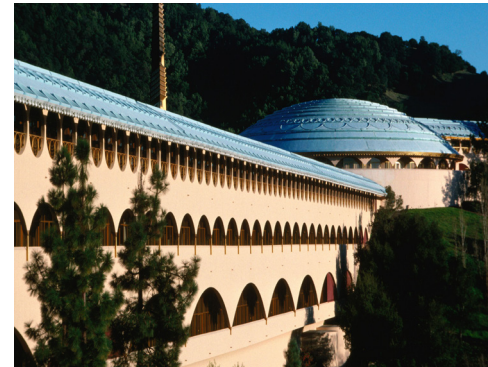


Fig. 031. Marin Civic Center. Lloyd, F. (1962)



Fig. 032. CLA Building. Predock, A. (1993)

This dichotomy is further expressed in the architecture of the film's two primary locations. The *Gattaca* Space Centre building, where only Valids may work, is the real-life Marin County Civic Centre (Fig. 031). A modern masterpiece, this building was designed to blend into the natural surroundings. In contrast, the apartment of the In-Valid protagonist is in the real-life CLA Building (Fig. 032) which was designed to be an icon that would stand apart from its surroundings. These two buildings represent the two competing philosophies of the film. The Civic Centre reinforces the idea that only the Valids fit into this new society, just as the building they occupy fits within the physical landscape. Meanwhile, just as the CLA building does not belong within the surrounding landscape, In-Valids do not belong to the now genetically superior world. *Gattaca*'s story is in fact an allegory discussing privilege and socio-economic advantage encapsulating the question of what defines potential for success, what one is handed or what one works for? By recontextualizing this discussion in an alternate world where people are given clear measurable advantages at birth, the struggle of the protagonist to overcome this system becomes more tangible and visually engaging for the audience.

| 3.0 DESIGN METHODOLOGY

The primary research method this study employed was the analysis, and evaluation of secondary commentary, of film and visual art case studies. The efficacy of this found data was then tested in the production of experimental pre-visualization design work for a film adaptation of *The Plague*.

The aim of this project was to develop a practical theory regarding the communication of story and philosophical allegory in visual media. To achieve this aim, this study conducted visual analysis of techniques employed in the *Cinéma Du Look* film movement, the filmography of director Terrence Malick, and the *Contemporary Realism* art movement. Specific case studies from these sources were selected after thorough socio-historical research into the contributions each piece made to contemporary popular culture. Furthermore, these pieces were selected based on their allegorical significance and relation to existentialist ideas. This study identified repeating techniques that have been consolidated into a practical framework which have been tested in the development of conceptual design work and pre-visualization key scenes for the proposed adaptation.

This project's intention has been to first gain a richer understanding of its subject material; this inductive approach was purposely chosen to allow greater flexibility and change in the projected design work as new ideas emerge from the collected research. As this study pulls case studies from different media, from various time periods, precautions were taken to avoid contemporary bias and pieces were viewed through the lens of modern entertainment concept design.



Fig. 033. Berber Sketch. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

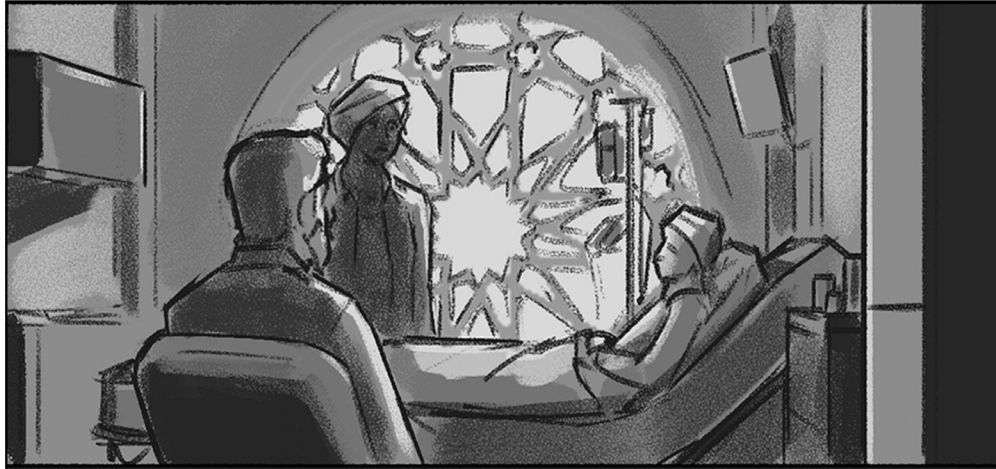


Fig. 034. Early Scene Thumbnail 01. Bronswijk, J. (2022)



Fig. 035. Early Scene Thumbnail 02. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

3.1 Existentialism as Method

At a fundamental level, the role of a designer aligns with that of existentialist philosophy: the creation of meaning from meaninglessness. More specifically there are three core ideas explored in existentialist philosophy that can inform practical design theory, which are that of: The Absurd, The Individual, and Ultimate Purpose.

3.1.1 The Absurd

The idea of The Absurd is the central dilemma of the branch of Existentialism known as Absurdism. Within philosophy it refers to the conflict between human's desire for meaning and the universe's objective meaninglessness. Historically, designers have taken a more literal approach to this term and used it as a justification to inject nonsensical, or otherwise absurd, imagery as symbolism into their respective media.

What Camus advocates is that creativity is a tool one can use in finding deeper meaning in The Absurd and communicating that to those around them. This suggests that the use of more creative elements, such as surrealist imagery, should be encouraged to make more directly clear the intended message within the allegory one is communicating.

3.2 Design Process

The creation of each of this project's key scene illustrations is divided into three design sprints - each derived from one of the three aforementioned existentialist ideas.

The first sprint is defined by extensive research into the opportunities of the story moment and high level design experimentation. This phase is defined by the concept of The Absurd as it is the time in the process where creativity should reign and more consideration should be given to an impactful and meaningful composition rather than detailed subject material. During this time the scene will be extensively storyboarded and several compositional mock ups should be made. By the end of this first sprint the high level elements of the final scene, such as composition and lighting, should be fully blocked out.

The second sprint in this process is defined by the idea of The Individual and is the time to begin justifying the abstractions of the first - to begin prescribing deeper meaning to individual subjects. It is in this phase that specific design briefs shall be extracted from the composition to be worked up separately to then be placed back in later as part of a cohesive whole.

The third and final phase of this process is defined by the idea of Ultimate Purpose and is spent taking the scene to a polished finish for presentation to a general audience unfamiliar with the explicit backstory. In line with the defining idea, special attention is given to considering the symbolic purpose of individual subjects so that they serve a purpose beyond surface-level iconic representation and act cohesively as part of a larger whole.



Fig. 038. Process Diagram. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

The collage consists of six images arranged in three rows. The top row shows a black and white aerial view of Oran, Algeria, and a close-up of two rats. The middle row shows a close-up of a priest's hands in a red cassock with a large gold cross. The bottom row contains four book covers: 'La Peste' (The Plague) by Albert Camus, 'The Plague' by Albert Camus, 'The Plague' by Albert Camus, and 'The Plague' by Albert Camus.

**1940's
Religion
Rats
Bubonic Plague
Lacking Diversity
Colour**

**Analogue Sci-Fi
Politics
Birds
Bird Flu
Character Diversity
Monochromatic
Noir / Art House**



The design process began by outlining the defining characteristics of the source material and deciding how these would be shifted to support the aims of the project.

4.1 Shifting the Setting

The first major shift the project would make is the world setting by reinterpreting Camus' contemporary 1940s French Algerian city of Oran into retro science-fiction. Without being bound to historical accuracy, this shift of genre allowed for much greater freedom of design and justified use of abstract imagery to serve as symbolism in support of the central allegory.

The first example of this was altering the city of Oran itself by scaling it up and removing all hints of civilization outside its walls. Reframing the city as perhaps the last point of humanity on the planet, wedged between an endless ocean and vast inhospitable desert, amplifies the setting's role as a microcosm symbolising the entire world therefore implying the story's allegory is applicable to all people. This also ups the stakes of the narrative by implying that the death of the city may be the death of all humanity, again supporting the central allegory of death being a universal phenomena everyone must face.

By upscaling the buildings, vertical layering is able to be utilised as a story-telling device to discuss class inequality while also visualising the people's collective reaching to heaven in search of a divine meaning.



Fig. 040. Oran-Rough 01. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

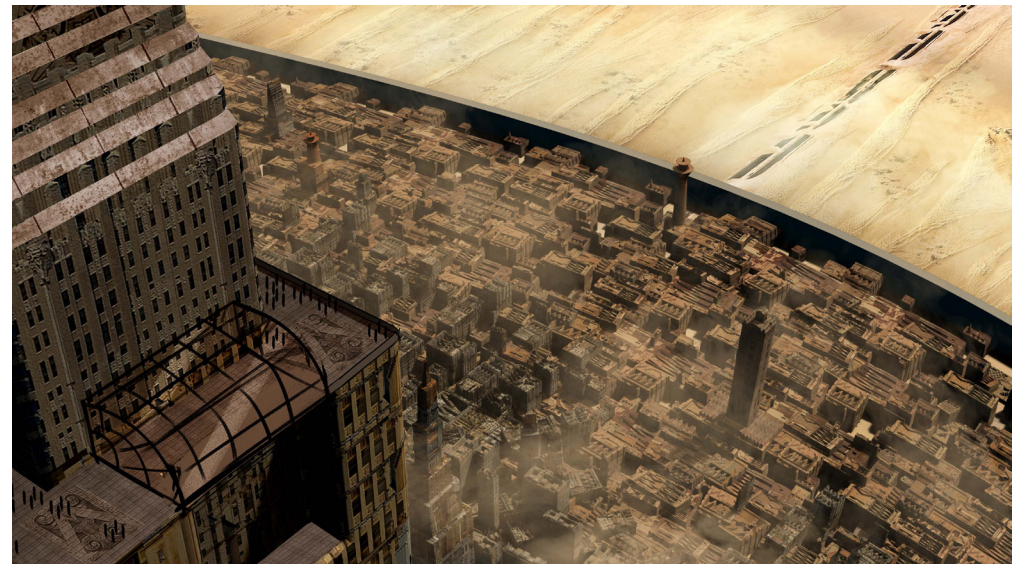


Fig. 041. Oran-Rough 02. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

4.2 Systems of Belief

The second path laid out by Camus that people follow when faced with The Absurd is to devote themselves entirely to an established religious or political system of belief - represented in *The Plague* by the Christian faith embodied by the Jesuit priest Father Paneloux. This project will shift this discussion to centre its criticism of systemic dogma around a populace political movement rather than a religious one. One reason for this shift was not to seem like this project was targeting Christianity specifically but rather the idea of dogmatic collective belief as a whole. With the current tumultuous political landscape made up of divergent political worldviews, there is also opportunity for this project to comment on current social phenomena such as radicalization through misinformation and political tribalism.

In our current political climate, defined by racial tension, nationalist extremism, class struggle, and most relevantly pandemic measures such as vaccination and lockdown mandates, such a reframing would likely resonate more strongly with a modern audience and serve as a cautionary tale against the dangers of becoming enthralled by such a system. The protest and subsequent riot in the story would also seem a direct reflection of recent such real-life events all over the world. The sermon scene in the cathedral where Paneloux blames the people for the plague as a punishment for not being pious enough may be more impactful to a modern audience if it were instead a scene depicting a central figure rallying the masses to riot against the quarantine as an 'unjust imprisonment by a tyrannical government.' Still needing to fill the human antagonist role, Paneloux would instead be the leader of an otherwise underground extremist group, who seizes on the confusion and fear caused by the pandemic in an attempt to overthrow the established order and take

power. This movement would have begun as a justified resistance to colonial invasion, or class oppression, but have become radicalised and violent reflecting many such populist movements throughout history.

4.3 Contemporary Sickness

The physical sickness central to the original novel is bubonic plague spread by fleas on rats. The proposed film adaptation will instead utilise a fictitious form of an aggressive respiratory illness spread by birds. The decision to shift the animal carriers of the disease from rats to birds was partially an aesthetic one. At the beginning of the original story countless dead rats fill the streets for days which will be visually confronting regardless of the animal. Where this shift turns into a positive is at the end where the decline of the plague is marked by the return of rats to the city streets. This same concept would be much more powerful, and visually apparent, in the form of birds filling the sky during the first act, only for them to be absent for the second act, and return at the end of the third. Birds are also less universally despised and so the audience will be more likely to feel positive emotions at the sight of them returning rather than disgust many would feel towards hordes of rats. Birds also occupy the same physical space as the super tall buildings, again reinforcing verticality as a story-telling device. The decision to shift the sickness from bubonic plague to a respiratory illness is to tie it more closely to the symptoms of the current COVID-19 pandemic making the disease more relatable. The decision was also made in regard to aesthetics. This project aims to present the film adaptation in a more contemplative and subdued art-house tone. The striking visuals of the symptoms of bubonic plague, and their subsequent treatment, may push the tone toward body horror which this project aims to avoid.

4.4 Shifting Character

The original 1947 story of *The Plague* is also defined by all its central characters being white men. This proposed film-adaptation aims to appeal to a modern cinematic audience which demands greater gender and racial diversity in the media they consume (Paris, 2014). This project therefore aimed to give greater agency to the minor female characters of the source material while also shifting the gender and race of a number of the central characters to align more with the historical demographics of 1940s Algeria. These shifts will however alter the story to accommodate them rather than simply changing these characteristics for the sake of surface level representation alone. This is not only to maintain an internal logic and believability to the world but also avoid misrepresenting social issues.

One example of this shift is the Father Paneloux character. Shifting the character to embody a political rather than a religious system provided an opportunity to design a new personification of the underlying allegorical discussion. This took the form of a young Berber woman leading an underground radical group. Outwardly she styles herself as a just saviour of the people but in truth she aims to use the power the people grant her to incite violent revolution out of a sadistic hatred for those who have wronged her in her life. Early design exploration uncovered the concept in fig. 042 - someone who is able to uphold a harmless and trustworthy facade when needed. She wears the attire of the working class to better fit in with her increasingly westernised world but maintains symbols of her heritage in traditional jewellery and tattoos. Of African, rather than Arab, descent her people have lived in these lands since time immemorial and see the French as just the latest in a long line of occupiers soon to be driven out.



Fig. 042. Paneloux Bust. Bronswijk.J. (2021)

4.5 Film-Noir

The Plague has no accompanying images to visualise its story other than the various book covers of its numerous publishing editions, the majority of which are in full colour. This project's film adaptation will interpret the story through a subdued art-house, *Film-Noir*, lens akin to *Boy Meets Girl* (Carax, 1984) or *The Fountain* (Aronofsky, 2007). The main advantage this adaptation will gain from aligning its method of communication with such films is their reputation for telling more mature stories dealing with complex existential subject material. One such technique is to shift the adaptation into a monochromatic colour scheme. This reduction of colour allowed for selective colour to be used to much greater effect. Only using colour sparingly will also force greater attention to be given to the use of light and value and the potential they have to shape key-scene composition to emphasise mood and atmosphere.

4.6 Story Adaptation

The adaptation process began by refining the content of the adapted source material down into a traditional three act film outline, making changes where necessary for the visual medium or in order to heighten the potential for visual allegory. Act I aims to introduce the city, the main characters, and begin the central conflict of the film. This first act opens the movie by showcasing everyone but the protagonist deny the existence of any sickness until it is too late and people begin dying at an increasing rate, ending with the city being placed in lockdown to prevent the spread. Act II explores how each of the main cast of characters deals with this new state of plague in the quarantined city. Cottard becomes rich off the new underground smuggling market while Paneloux takes advantage of the situation to

incite violent revolution against the colonial government. It is only the protagonist, Dr. Rieux, and his two colleagues that actively try to fight the plague by any means necessary, coming to a climax with one of them getting sick and accepting his fate. Act III opens with this character's miraculous recovery - the first person not to succumb to the disease. Seemingly out of nowhere the plague dissipates as quickly as it began and the people of Oran's lives return to normal, going right back to their denial of death seemingly not learnt anything from their experience. The film ends on a sombre note, acknowledging the fact that plagues are as common as war, yet people are always surprised when either appears. Plot points highlighted in yellow (Fig. 043) are the four moments that this project will explore in storyboards and then bring to life as fully realised key scene illustrations. These particular moments were chosen for their allegorical significance in showcasing the respective paths of Absurdism.

4.6.1 Grief as a Visual Story-Telling Device

The story is thematically cyclical, with the philosophical mindset of the people returning to where it was when the story began. What was observed when placed in this format was that the plot beats line up uncannily well with the five stages of the popular Kübler-Ross model of grief (Kübler-Ross, 2005) which is also described as cyclical in nature. Each of these stages has an associated colour linked to the corresponding psychological state. There is potential for these colours to code the film as it is intended to be monochromatic. This stylistic approach to colour would add a layer of psychological depth to the film, communicating emotional states visually and possibly even inducing those states in the viewing audience.

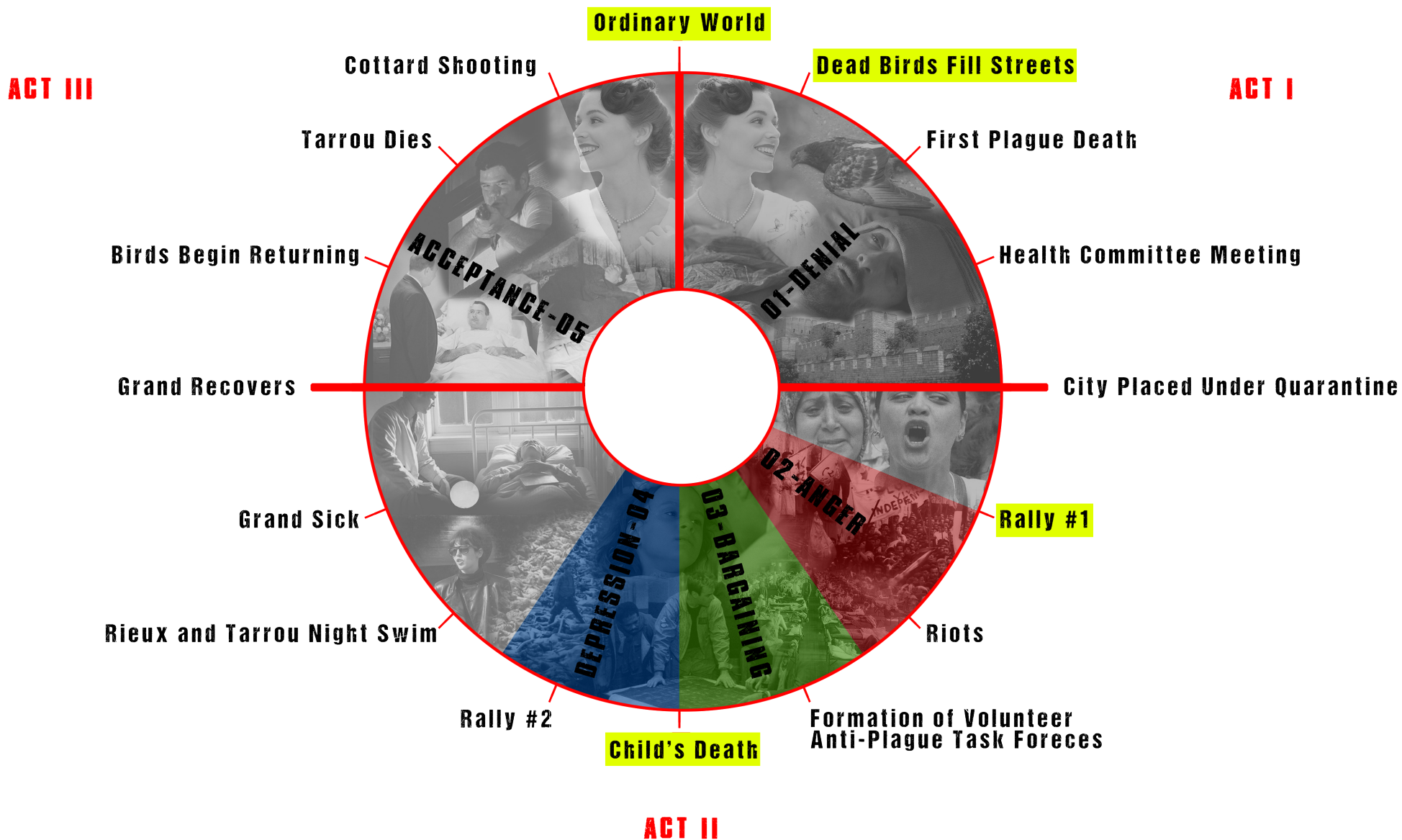


Fig. 043. Adapted Story Diagram. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

|5.0 DESIGN OUTCOMES

5.1 Phase 01: The Absurd

After the framework for the adapted story was established the first design work could be produced. In accordance with the process devised around the three existentialist ideas, the first phase of practical design centred around discovering the opportunities of each story moment and the defining of briefs.

This exploration of each of the chosen plot points was primarily done through rough narrative-focused storyboarding. While these boards did hint at technical instructions for cinematography regarding things such as shot type, the primary focus was to plot out the evolving action and emotion of the scene. Keeping in line with the idea of The Absurd, it was within this initial stage that creativity, and pushing of the source material, was paramount.

Continually referring back to the film case studies identified within the *Cinéma Du Look* movement, special attention was given to how they utilised filmmaking gimmicks that visualised the allegorical discussion. These may include techniques such as obvious compositions to inform the viewer of the oppressive atmosphere the character is experiencing (Fig. 044) or telephoto shots to bring a speaker and audience closer together implying their influence over one another (Fig. 045). Once the story was thoroughly explored, compositional studies were done to plan out the final key scene (Fig. 046).

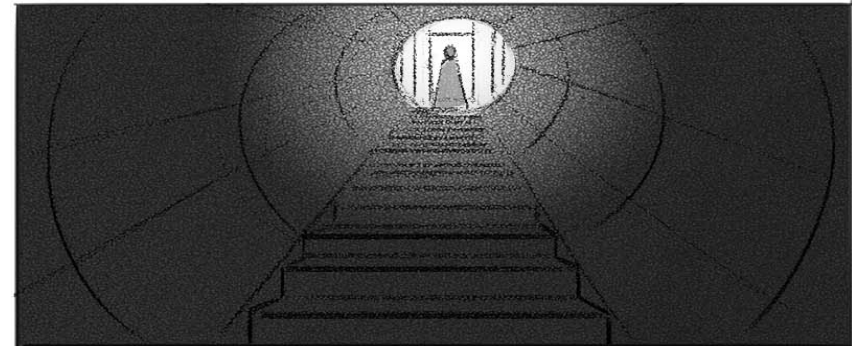


Fig. 044. Storyboard-01. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

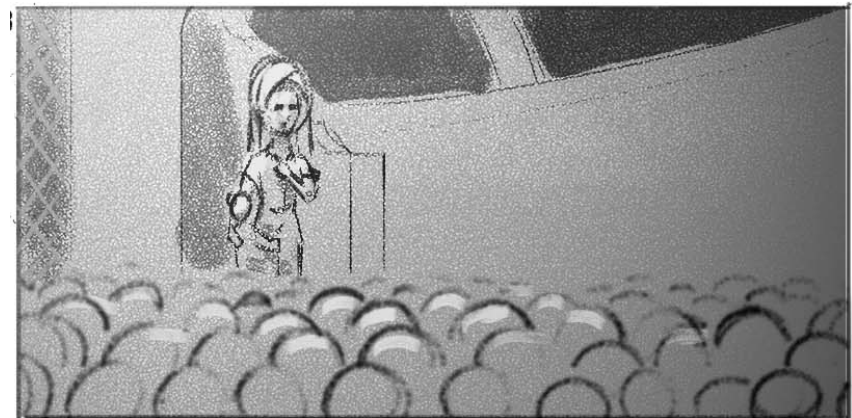


Fig. 045. Storyboard-02. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 046. Early Composition Thumbnails. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

5.1.1 Initial Exploration

At the very beginning of this project, once the subject material had been thoroughly examined and understood, initial visualisation of the underlying allegory was explored in monochromatic compositional thumbnails. These were intended to take a macro approach to the scenes, first exploring the potential for compositional shapes and value to communicate emotion and a visual story. The

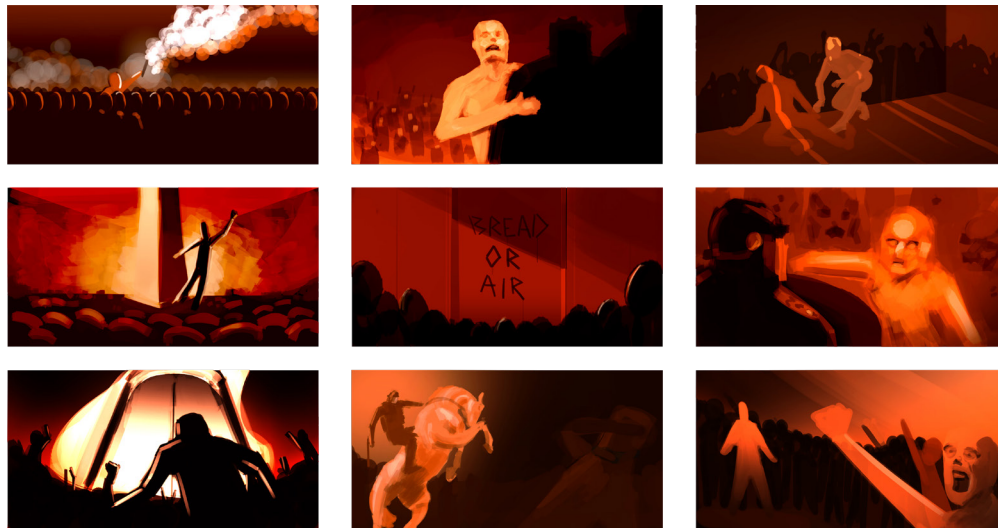


Fig. 047. Early Thumbnails 01. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 048. Early Thumbnails 02. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

impactful results such a limited workflow, only focusing on value and lighting, produced is what led this project to begin research into the conventions of early *Film-Noir* cinema. This ultimately resulted to the decision to keep the final images and the majority of preceding design work in a monochromatic colour scheme.



Fig. 049. Early Thumbnails 03. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 050. Early Thumbnails 04. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

5.2 Phase 02: The Individual

With the opportunities of the story moment thoroughly explored and the final composition outlined, the individual design briefs can be tackled. Defined by the concept referred to as The Individual, the aim of this phase was to design who the characters are and what they represent, not simply what they look like. After an initial phase of narrowing down the basic identifying aesthetic of a character, each would be further explored in what this project will refer to as 'personality sketches.' These are looser portrait studies of the characters as they would be seen in the final film. These sketches serve the dual function of exploring the character's personality and physical presence while also exploring the visual tone of the final film. These sketches embody the notion put forth by Sartre that "existence precedes essence" - that it is solely our action that defines us rather than any outside force. By implying scenarios through contextualising elements such as facial expression, lighting, and body language, the designer gains a richer understanding of the deeper aspects of the characters which will go on to inform further design.



Fig. 051. Plague Symptoms. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 052. Paneloux Design Exploration. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 053. Paneloux Personality Sketches. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

THE PLAGUE

Berber Revolutionaries
Jack Bronswijk

Hard labourers from a dominated culture and decimated ethnicity. After a century of foreign subjugation, the younger generation seizes on the opportunity to fight back.

“We have nothing to lose but our chains”

002

3 February 22

Traditional Berber head wrap
passed down through
generations reduced to a rag
- degradation of culture

Company Uniform
- branding of ownership,
replacement of identity

Islamic prayer beads bandaging
workplace amputation
- continually praying for better
future, has not lost hope

01

Salvaged safety gear

Those in power do not
care for the lives of
the workers

Improvised safety gear

Tools of the oppressor used
as weapons of liberation

02

Substantial burn scars
- work is dangerous
and they are given no
protective equipment

Limited clothing they
own only enough to
protect most
vulnerable areas

Emaciated and frail
- Only opportunity for work
pays minuscule wage. Lives
in poverty, unable to afford
regular meals or basic
necessities

Improvised tool belt to
speed up work output
- high demands with no
aid to meet demands

03

Deliberate X scarring
as punishment

Well muscled
- their subjugation
has made them
stronger than their
subjugators

Company branded tool
- tools belong to
company not the individual

Scars at different
stages of healing
- work continually
inflicts new injuries

Only clean thing he
owns is his prayer
beads
- highly values his
culture and beliefs

JB
22

Fig. 054. Worker Personality Sketches. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

5.3 Phase 03: Ultimate Purpose

Once all the separate elements of the scene are developed individually they can be reintroduced into the composition to be polished into a cohesive whole. This final phase consists entirely of finishing the final deliverable scene and so no new ideas are introduced. The main objective of this stage revolves around the existentialist concept of Ultimate Purpose. This stage tasks the designer with ensuring each of these disparate elements come together cohesively to form a whole which speaks to a deeper message than what is being presented on the surface.

5.3.1 Scene 01: The City of Oran

The first key scene is themed around the first stage of grief: denial. An establishing shot of the City of Oran, this image serves to contextualise subsequent scenes by introducing the inciting incident and the alternate world in which the story takes place. Intended to set an ominous tone, the wild waves herald an incoming storm. The image showcases the key conflicts that will be explored more deeply in following illustrations by the subject's spatial relation to one another in the 2d plane of the image. The primary example of this spatial relation is the interspersed architectural styles of the city's buildings which visualise the ethnic and class tension explored in scene 03. The outer layer of the city is predominantly occupied by low-rise buildings following the traditional Berber style. Behind this is a layer of iconic Haussmann architecture reminiscent of that found in Paris. Lastly, the core of the city is dominated by immense buildings following a classic Art Deco style culturally tied to wealth and power. This ascension of building height demonstrates vertical layering as a visual story-telling device to symbolise the city's class struggles while giving insight into the prominent ethnic demographic of each layer - the first being of the

native inhabitants of the region and the latter two being distinctly early to mid-twentieth century French. The height of the buildings also serve to visually demonstrate what the people of the city value and in what they find individual purpose. The two towered mosques on the right of the image represent the importance of religion in the people's lives. Both of these are in a state of disrepair, one topped by a French flag symbolising the invaders' dominance. While the church near the centre of the image is in good condition, symbolising the French culture's influence, it is utterly dwarfed by the larger financial buildings on the left which extend past the frame of the image to emphasise their scale visually symbolising the importance wealth and material things play in the lives of the city's inhabitants. To further accentuate this point, this high physical space is also occupied with the vehicles of trade and commerce. More subtly however, the air is also full of birds which spread the sickness that will develop into the subsequent plague outbreak. The first hints of this can be seen in the small scene playing out in the foreground which depicts dead birds littering the area. A child picks one up to show their father who dismissively continues fishing representing the people's collective indifference to the situation.



Fig. 055. Oran Breakdown. Bronswijk, J. (2022)



Fig. 056. The City of Oran. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

5.3.2 Scene 02: First Encounter

The second scene continues the theme of denial but introduces Dr Rieux as a counterpoint to begin questioning the status quo. The scene depicts the story's protagonist and antagonist in the film's first appearance of symptoms of the plague. The image serves to visually demonstrate the two opposing philosophical stances each will take in how they react to the coming epidemic, thereby setting up the conflict of the rest of the story. The primary tool to achieve this was the strategic use of light to differentiate the interior and exterior space outlining two distinct spheres of thought. Paneloux stands outside in shadow presenting a dismissive smile while Dr. Rieux sits illuminated inside his car with a look of uneasy concern on his face.

This scene was also an exercise in passive story-telling, set dressing the space with items that give insight into the characters. A doctor's bag can be seen in the back seat and a medical identification card next to the vehicle instruments on the dash all subtly informing the viewer of Rieux's occupation. Traditional Berber jewellery can be seen hung from the rearview mirror hinting at Rieux's heritage and personal relationships. Simultaneously Paneloux's costume design speaks not just to her character but also aids in the world-building of the alternate setting. An ethnically Berber woman wearing a traditional headdress and jewellery in juxtaposition to the lower class western working attire of a dirty collared shirt. This visually communicates a take over of the native culture by the colonial power and lends credibility to the cause she will rally her people around in the next key scene illustration.



Fig. 057. First Encounter. Bronswijk.J. (2021)

5.3.2.1 Scene 02: Storyboard Exploration

In order to ensure that the allegorical discussion of the story was communicated clearly, multiple interpretations of each scene was sketched out as storyboards to explore the opportunities the moment provided. These first attempts at visualising the text produced an

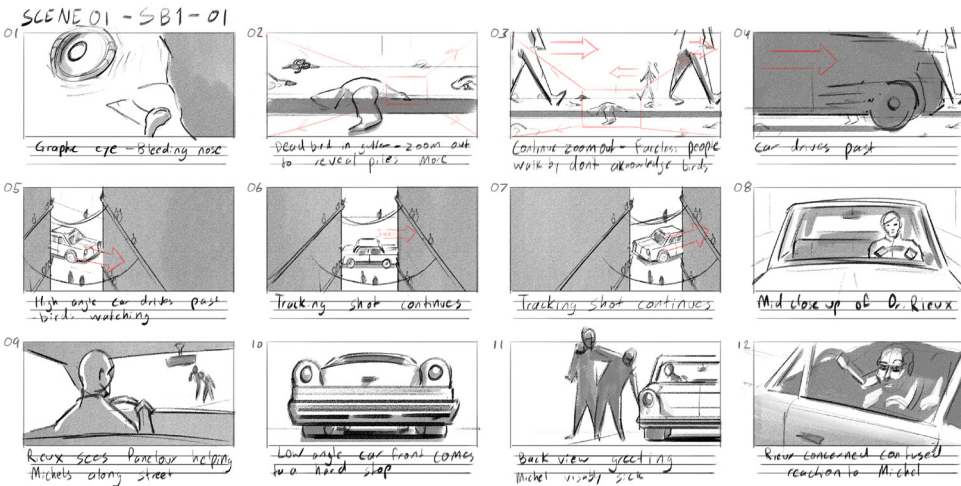


Fig. 058. Storyboard Sequence 01. Bronswijk, J. (2021)



Fig. 059. Storyboard Sequence 02. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

important foundation for subsequent exploration of composition and design work by generating ideas quickly. Doing multiple interpretations ensured a broader range of subject material at these early stages.

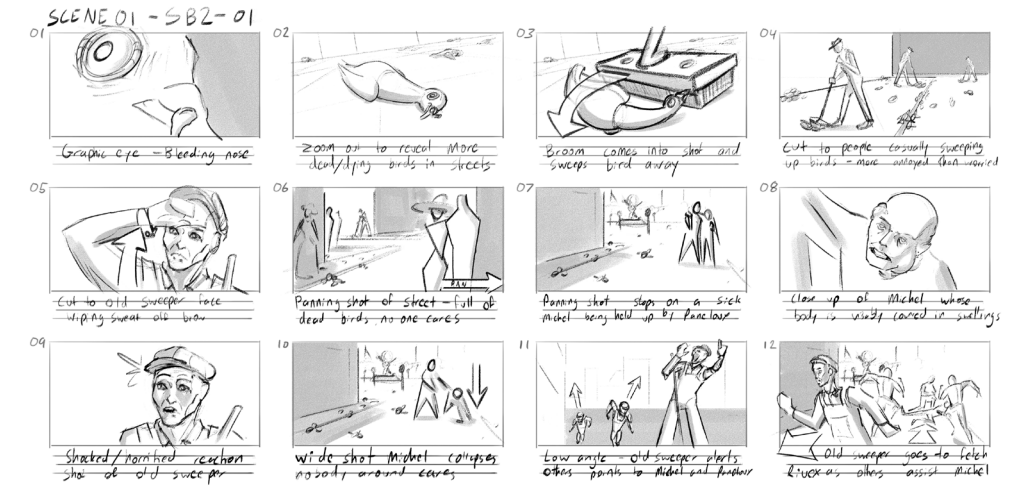


Fig. 060. Storyboard Sequence 03. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

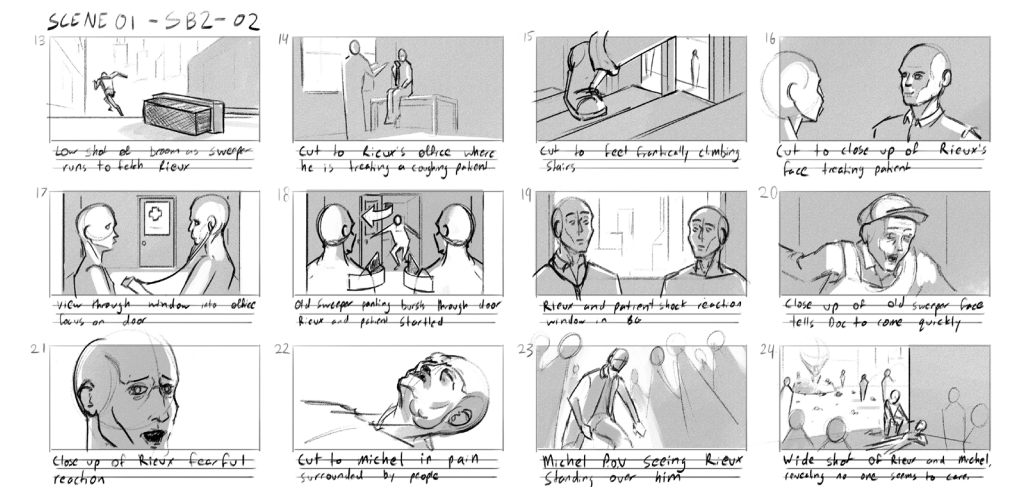


Fig. 061. Storyboard Sequence 04. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

The first story moment used to develop this workflow was, fittingly, Dr. Rieux's first encounter with definitive symptoms of the plague early in the novel. The story moment comes after days of the streets filling up with dead rats and is meant to come off as tense and uneasy, serving to foreshadowing the crisis to come. At this stage the people of Oran are in firm denial that anything is amiss in their contented lives. This is reflected in Father Paneloux, still a priest at this stage in the project's development, and even the sufferer of the plague symptoms themselves who outright refuses to acknowledge their visibly declining health.

The first storyboard sequence (Fig. 058, 059) plays into a more ominous tone, focusing heavily on the amount of birds in the street. The second (Fig. 060, 061) intended to focus more on the townspeople of Oran and their denial while the third sequence (Fig. 062, 063, 064) intended to showcase more of the environment itself.

Scene 01 - SB3 - 01

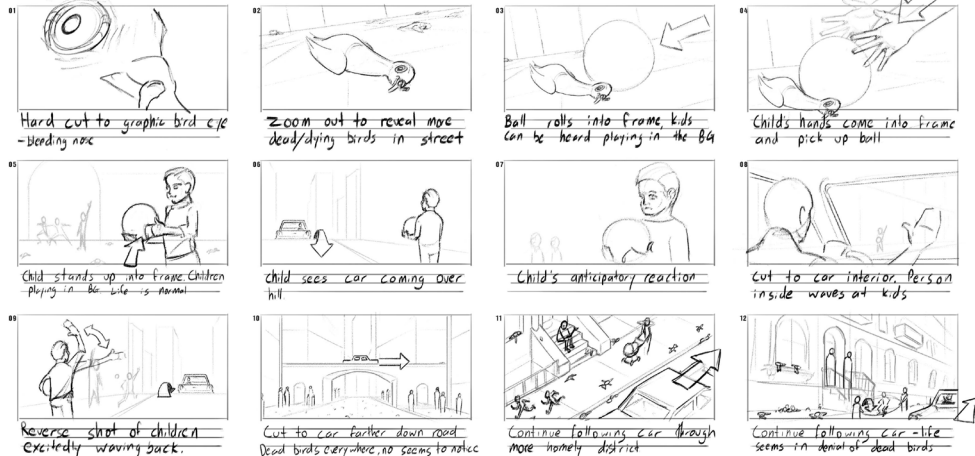


Fig. 062. Storyboard Sequence 05. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

Scene 01 - SB3 - 02

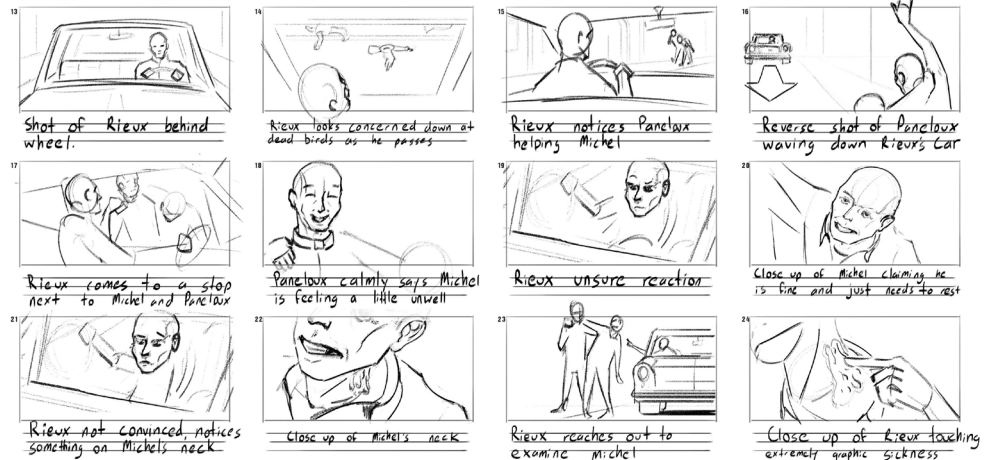


Fig. 063. Storyboard Sequence 06. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

Scene 01 - SB3 - 03



Fig. 064. Storyboard Sequence 07. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

5.3.3 Scene 03: Rallying the Masses

Scene 03 depicts the thematic shift in the film from denial to anger. Playing to the crowd's fears and prejudices through powerful charisma, Paneloux rallies the working class and breaks her people out of denial into a false new reality. This scene takes full advantage of the opportunities an alternate world provides, specifically the justified use of abstract imagery to represent larger ideas. Massive cogs and gears such as these are unlikely in reality but as a representation of the mechanisms keeping the city running, showing the mob taking over the space more easily communicates the underlying implication that they are bringing the city to a halt, solidifying the danger they pose and the power they possess.

A key reference for this scene in particular was artistic depictions of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia which ushered in the birth of the Soviet Union. As this was a populace working class revolution that ultimately led to an oppressive totalitarian government, imitating associated imagery, such as the reaching hands to a central figure and use of banners as strong compositional shapes, will link Paneloux's uprising to that movement and communicate visually how a viewer is supposed to interpret the scene.

While scene 02 was completely digitally hand painted, scene 03 was produced using a different technical workflow incorporating the use of digital 3D models and photo textures. The rigid perfectionism these techniques produced was antithetical to the loose expressive style of *Contemporary Realism*. To counter this, great effort was put into

painting back into the image to ensure these elements melded together into a holistic end result. Incorporating atmospheric perspective and overlaying atmospheric particles such as dust and light rays also aided in reducing the artificial feel of the base 3D renders.



Fig. 065. Rallying the Masses. Bronswijk.J. (2022)

5.3.3.1 Scene 03: Composition Exploration

Once the opportunities of a scene have been thoroughly explored in storyboards, composition options for the final key scene illustration could be mocked up. These would only be developed to a rough thumbnail in order to keep attention on the larger idea of the image rather than getting bogged down in subject detail. The main goal of these thumbnails was to drive collaborative discussion through mood and tone.

Scene 03, depicting Paneloux rallying the workers to revolt, needed to communicate the anger of the worker as well as the danger of extremist collective belief. Unbalancing the image by presenting it at a Dutch angle aided in communicating to the audience a sense of discomfort and tension. Placing a visibly angry figure in the foreground further communicated to the audience a sense of mood and strong emotion. The alternate world allowed for the use of clear iconography in the visual allegory. This scene had originally intended to place Paneloux on top of a massive cog, depicting her literally disrupting the mechanisms that sustain the city.

The composition of the final illustration makes heavy use of tropes prominent in Soviet era propaganda paintings. These tropes include the reaching hands to a central figure and the political flags. Beyond the iconographic connection, these elements also act as strong compositional elements guiding the viewers eye around the image .



Fig. 066. Composition Thumbnail. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

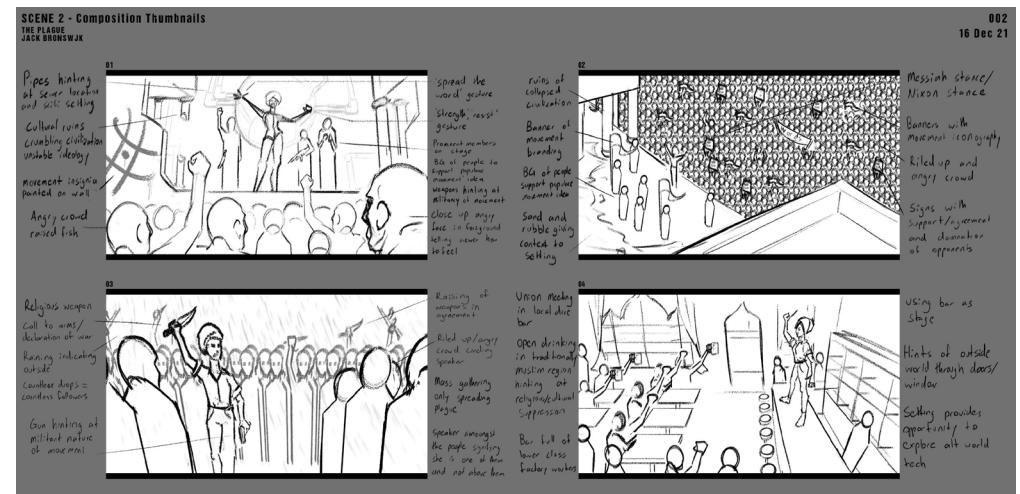


Fig. 067. Composition Sheet 01. Bronswijk, J. (2021)

SCENE 2 - Rally - Composition Thumbnails

THE PLAGUE
JACK BRONSWJK

004

26 Jan 22

Foundry = Obvious danger
Interesting lighting

01



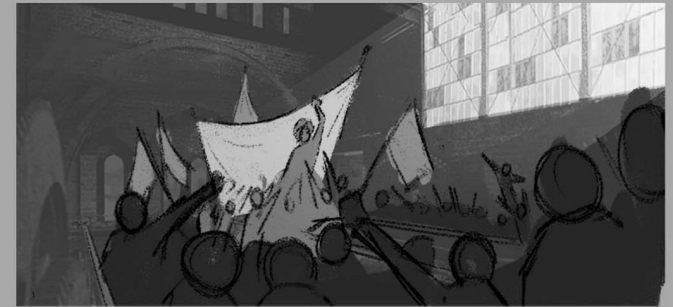
Literally stopping the gears of production

02



Soviet workers revolution iconography
(reaching hands, flags, central figure)

03



04



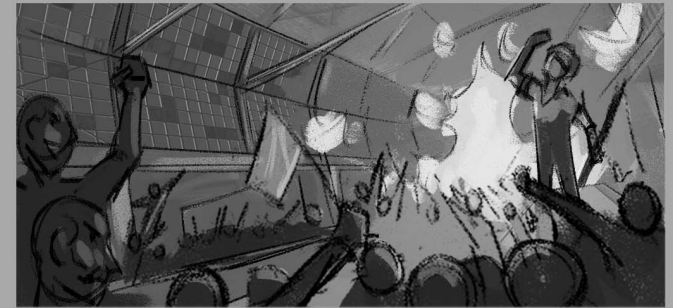
combining with riot scene (Worker Uprising)
Jan 6th Capitol riot imagery (political connection)

05



Paneloux leading the uprising from among the people out of the factory into the streets against riot police

06



More Savage call to arms after setting fire to the factory at night. Interesting lighting opportunities. Comment on tribal nature of extreme collective ideology

Fig. 068. Composition Sheet 02. Bronswijk, J. (2022)

5.3.4 Scene 04: Death of a Child

The fourth scene depicts the excruciating death of Paneloux's daughter after she is given an experimental cure for the plague and serves to thematically shift the film from bargaining to depression.

Taking strong visual reference from the cinematography of *Boy Meets Girl*, this image relies heavily on the use of light to selectively obscure sections of the frame. This not only serves to heighten the tense atmosphere of the moment and direct the viewer through the key focal points of the image, but also as a visualisation of the character's inner thoughts. Rieux in the background is lost in darkness, horrified at the realisation that his intervention led to the child needlessly suffering longer and more intensely than she would have otherwise. Paneloux is fading into that same despair but still holding on to hope, figuratively and literally as she clings onto the light of the sheets and refuses to let her daughter go. All the while, the child is bathed in stark filtered light which serves the dual function of symbolising the uncertainty of her fate as well as selectively conceal sections of her face to allow the audience to imagine the worst.

This selective use of lighting was deliberately chosen to cast the scene in chiaroscuro in order to heighten the drama of the moment. The high contrast use of values lends itself to the moral ambiguity of the events taking place and cues the viewer in on how to interpret the scene's action. By using such a lighting scheme the scene ties itself to other established genres of film such as *Film-Noir*.



Fig. 069. Death of a Child. Bronswijk.J. (2022)

5.3.4.1 Scene 04: Identifying Themes

In order to better understand the opportunities of each of the scenes, a useful exercise was to simplify the story moment into one or two sentences and then extract the key defining themes. These extracted words could then be expanded into a subset of related words and ideas. This process provides a wealth of topics to guide background research and the gathering of visual reference to aid in the development of the final key scene illustration.

The fourth scene depicting the death of Paneloux's child can be delineated down to: 'in an auxiliary hospital, in a requisitioned classroom, a Berber child is given an experimental serum to cure their bubonic plague. As the sun rises after two days of intense suffering, the child dies.' This condensed description of the story moment identifies the environment, the central character, and the main action of the scene.

From this, themes surrounding death, sickness, and suffering are identified but also themes related to the dawning of a new day and the dangers of technology - things not explicitly called attention to in the source material. From here research can begin into how such themes have historically been represented in visual media allowing the borrowing of iconography to tie the scene more clearly to those idea.

A key choice this process influenced was dressing the child in white to represent their purity and innocence to then dirty their clothes to signify the loss of this innocence after the intense suffering they are forced to endure.

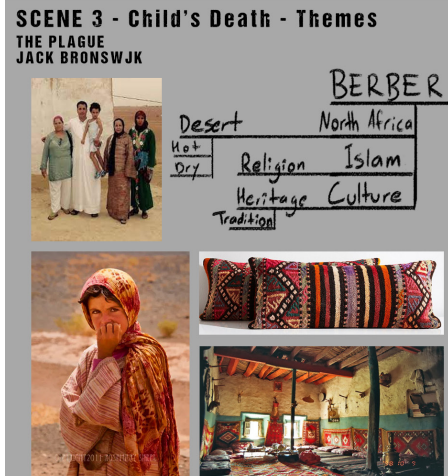
SCENE 3 - Child's Death - Themes
THE PLAGUE
JACK BRONSWJK

2 April 22

BERBER

Desert North Africa

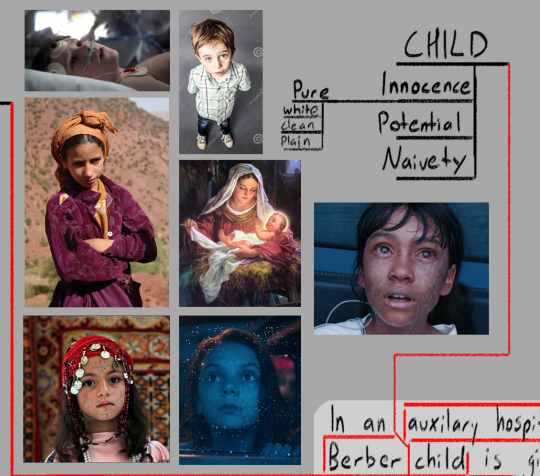
Hot Dry Religion Islam Heritage Culture Tradition



CHILD

Pure Innocence Potential Naivety

White Dead Plain

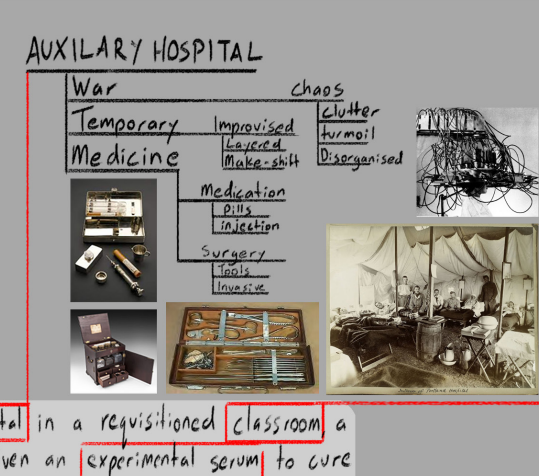


AUXILIARY HOSPITAL

War Temporary Medicine


Improvise Layered Make-shift Medication Pills Injection Surgery Tools Invasive

Chaos Clutter Turmoil Disorganised



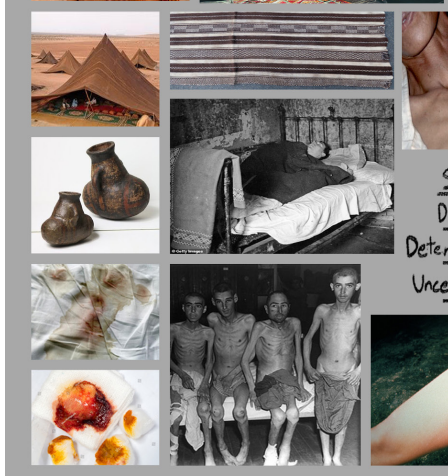
SCHOOL

Future Knowledge Books Institution Sacred Purpose



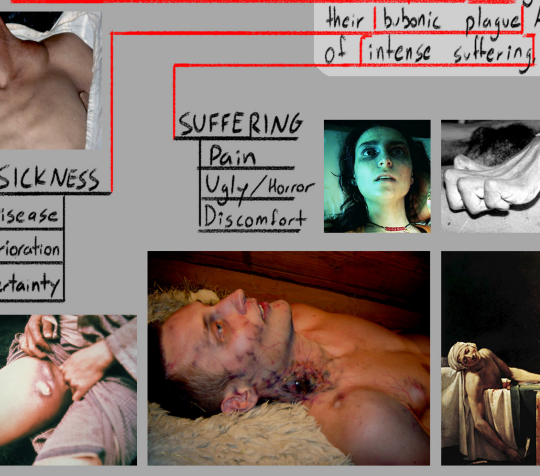
SICKNESS

Disease Deterioration Uncertainty




SUFFERING

Pain Ugly/Horror Discomfort




DEATH

Ending Mortality Sorrow



TECHNOLOGY

Science Progress Machinery Engineering Risk + Reward Danger



In an auxiliary hospital in a requisitioned classroom a Berber child is given an experimental serum to cure their bubonic plague. As the sun rises after two days of intense suffering the child dies.

Fig. 070. Scene Dissection. Bronswijk, J. (2022)



| 6.0 CONCLUSION

The intention of this research study was to understand how allegory is used in fiction to discuss complex philosophical ideas for a general audience. To explore this subject, this project put forth the notion that incorporating ideas found in mid-twentieth-century existentialist philosophy, that surround similar questions, would be able to inform the design process to deepen the potential for the inclusion of allegory. Investigation into this hypothesis took the form of a body of pre-visualisation and conceptual design work that culminated in the creation of four key scene illustrations that communicated the core absurdist allegory of *The Plague* and adapting it for a visual medium. From this body of work one can conclude that fiction is a valid tool for discussing complex philosophical concepts such as existential questions which are highlighted in times of communal crisis.

This project has also demonstrated the benefits of applying those same existential questions to the design process when producing pre-production key scenes for film in order to give work produced greater depth and symbolic significance. By shifting the fundamental end goal of design to discovering who characters are and what they represent rather than simply what they look like, concept design can serve a more foundational role in the development of stories containing philosophical discussion. Only one text was adapted using the method developed over the course of this study which limits one's ability to say conclusively that this approach is applicable in every pre-production phase, particularly those geared more toward pure entertainment. One area where this study does provide new insight, however, is in how future designers can contribute to the narrative development of a production through the implementation of visual symbolism and producing more fleshed out

character design by generating personality sketches. Based on these conclusions it is clear the power concept design has to shape the emotional journey an audience experiences when viewing a piece of media. As this study focused primarily on character design and cinematography, to better understand the implications of this project's findings, future studies may address the connection between set design and allegory and the role environments play in shaping the underlying discussion within media.

The stories a society tells one another are foundational to shaping its future and highlight the values it holds in highest esteem. By being conscious of the stories we tell and intentionally introducing deeper conversations in them we can effectively steer those around us to a better understanding of themselves and empower them to work towards true purpose in life.

JACK BRONSWIJK

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