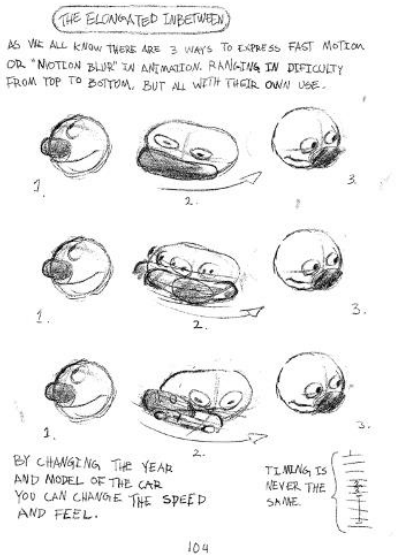
Inbetweening – Smearing

Inbetweening is a term from animation practice that refers to the creation of the missing frames between two key images, or “extremes,” in an animated sequence. An "extreme" is a key pose where the motion or position is at its most pronounced. Inbetweening traditionally holds the lowest status in animation work. It is often seen as uncreative or mechanical—something to be outsourced or automated—because it is assumed to merely trace a predetermined path from point A to point B.

But I’ve always found inbetweening to be a bit magical. Unraveling how a transformation occurs between two very different forms opens up a space for transformative imagination.

Spending time in that "in-between" space—between where you're coming from and where you think you're going—can become a moment of indeterminacy and fluidity. When you animate, you often discover richer, more nuanced possibilities for moving from A to B than what was originally imagined. Sometimes things emerge in the in-betweens that are completely absent from the extremes.

Take, for example, the “inbetween smear” or “elongated in-betweens” (see: *Smear Frames in Video Games*, Christoph Lendenfeld), where entirely new spacetime forms can materialize—distorted images that contain multiple temporalities or phases of movement all at once.



This practice has expanded my thinking beyond animation. It has become a way to reflect on how fixed positions in everyday life might also be reimagined. When a path seems predetermined and no alternatives appear possible, the distorted inbetween—the absurd or transitional form—can disrupt and model new directions in thought.

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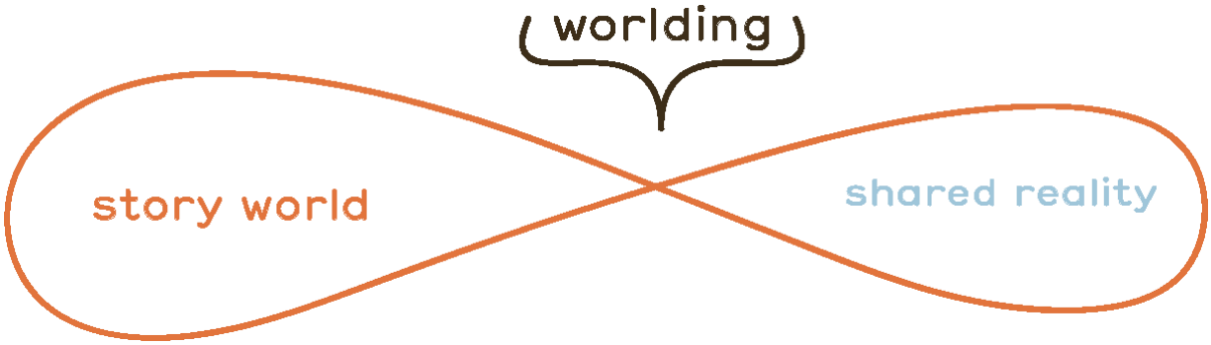
The smear is also a model of immediate, fast transformation. In animation, the distorted, smeared inbetween is used to represent movements too quick for the human eye or for camera technologies (such as the 25 fps standard) to register each step. Instead, all the movement phases are merged into one image: one part still shaped by the old pose, the other already forming the new. It is an image with one foot in the past and the other in the future. One foot in the old world, one foot in a new world.

For me, the practice of inbetweening has become an embodied model for imagining and enacting transformation—especially transformation away from dominant, hegemonic, or unsustainable versions of reality. It has helped bridge the gap between artistic visions for society and the dominant social realities we are often told are the only viable options.

The experience of inbetweening has for example guided me in navigating gaps between a climate-just imaginary and how we teach, plan, and develop film production at our institution. (Read more about this in:)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