# Ch 2 - Buried Alive

In the introductory section of Camus’ *The Rebel*, he posits that the entirety of his endeavor to explore the subject matter is, in essence, an attempt to make sense of his own time.1 Similarly, I am approaching this project in the hopes that I can better understand myself and what it is I actually stand for. I suppose in that regard, this project is inherently selfish, but then again, maybe all stories are the selfish inner-narratives of an artist struggling to create something… out of nothing. Whatever the case, it will be important to set up some context to which we can apply the theories of our exploration. To start, I'll tell you a little about myself.

Growing up, as the oldest of my family, I was the first to experience many things; puberty, high school, college, paying taxes… My parents tried their best to shield my siblings and me from the absurdities of the world, particularly the harsher realities of the times. A noble endeavor—for which I cannot assign blame—but once the veil of bliss started to wash away and I was exposed to the raw happenstance of the world, I easily became overwhelmed. I realized that there was value in words and in interactions; that there were stakes far beyond anything I was capable of comprehending. Worse yet, I realized how small I was in the grand scheme of things.

I grew increasingly anxious, trying to stay within this arbitrary bubble of comfort I had inherited from childhood. With every irrational worry, I was inadvertently training my brain to respond to uncertainty with isolation. I let other people do my talking for me, relying on my extroverted friends to connect me with others, inform my own actions in public, and adapt to new environments. As a consequence, I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere, for I spent most of the time isolating myself even in places of relative comfort.

In college, I realized that my brain just wasn’t wired for learning computer science in the ways of traditional academia, so I chased after whatever hints of passion I could find. My history with computers was just as strong as my history with art, so switching to graphic design made complete sense to me and to anyone that knew me. Even before I had taken an HTML course in high school that ultimately led me to pursue computer science, I had all but dedicated myself as a future graphic design major.

At first, I didn't quite understand the process of making art. Admittedly, it wasn’t until my last year that I realized the process of creation goes far beyond simply “getting it done,” or checking something off the to-do list. Far from simple bureaucratic busywork, art is something that can really only be good (or worthy of a good grade, in this case) if one actually *believes in it* and *wills it to be good*. An art project may be pitched like homework, but insofar as getting it done, the only thing it has in common is the time it will take to do it. And there will always be projects that you just don’t relate to and that’s fine—you can do perfectly well by just getting it done—but it is unlikely that the work will stand out or inspire. That doesn’t mean yours will be bad, but it is evident to others that those who apply themselves to their art are the ones most likely to make something beautiful.

To apply any amount of creativity to a project, I have to be personally and passionately compelled to do so. I suspect there is a universal truth to this, but the very act of finding that inspiration is something that continues to elude me. ~~I know not the degree to which I am neurodivergent~~ [since writing this I’ve actually gotten tested for inattentive ADHD… easily passed that test!], but it makes sense that I would find something boring and not worth the time if I don’t care about the subject. It takes so much effort for me to apply myself, traveling to the core of my creative mind and asking for guidance. I was struggling to understand myself and my capabilities—like a tortoise that doesn't know how to retreat into its shell. I was vulnerable and submissive to social pressures in the hopes of being spared. And with a general lack of direction or passion in my life, one can imagine it was difficult to apply myself to any project, for school or otherwise.

This state of helplessness and fatigue wasn't easily shaken by a newfound interest, though. I explored my passions primarily through courses I found…well, most interesting. I seem to be very good at retaining information about climate change and philosophy, for example. At this point in my life, I separated my experience as a student into a dichotomy of time: *in class* or *out of class*. Because I was struggling so significantly, every minute in class drained me. I felt empty when I got out of class and taught myself that learning is relegated to inside the classroom only. But if you're truly passionate about something, shouldn’t you be excited to learn and grow outside the classroom as well? Even though I had started to find things that interested me, I had immense trouble applying them to my projects. The automatic response to taking on such a responsibility was that of an anxiety to create.

In course work and in my personal projects, I harbored a certain hesitation to apply myself to the process. My lack of passion led to a fear of failure, as I didn't understand what was prohibiting me from achieving good marks. The risks associated with creating something worthwhile became entangled with the possibility of failure. I became catatonic even with my best ideas. In the event that I stumbled upon a great concept, my execution was always lacking due to that anxiety to jump in head-first.

When I was considering switching majors, it felt obvious to inquire about the graphic design program here at the University of Dayton. Since my dad has worked for the university longer than I’ve been alive, I have always known I would end up here after high school. Art was my favorite class in high school, up until a group of friends and I had taken programming one or whatever the class was called, where we learned basic HTML. I basically fell in love with the precision and apparent aptitude I felt in creating and designing shitty websites. Little did I know that experience wasn’t universal to computer science as a whole. Three semesters in, I recognized I didn’t have the discipline to essentially teach myself how to code from a textbook with minimally helpful lectures. I retreated to graphic design in the hopes of continuing to work creatively within software.

I spent years romanticizing a career and hobby centered around 3D modeling and texturing, but UD was primarily an engineering (and party) school. The art department lacked funds and interest in such a field, so graphic design was the closest I was going to get to being taught 3D art. Because of that and my brutish understanding of passion and living life in general, I put off learning Blender—the primary software for most independent, newbie 3D artists. This is not to equate it with training wheels though, for Blender is a truly remarkable piece of software. It’s a fellow open source comrade. Regardless, I had downloaded Blender and tried to follow tutorials before, but couldn’t maintain interest in the learning process. It felt so daunting, booting it up, fumbling around the viewport, and getting lost in the many different nodes and modifiers...

When the pandemic rolled around though, I found myself struggling to stay occupied. I was stuck in my childhood bedroom, isolating from my family because they made me feel so stressed about my future. The constant reminders of needing a job and work for a portfolio... as if I wasn’t already terrified of failing in such prospects. Each time it was mentioned felt like they were adding an extra bag of sand on my shoulders. They had good intentions, for they were worried for me—they wanted me to live a good life as much as I did. But their worries became mine, and I bore both of our collective anxieties. It grew harder to proceed with every stacked bag. Eventually though, around September of that year, with my legs wobbling and my balance teetering, my anxiety caught up to me. I realized I only had such a short time left in college. I knew I needed to begin learning this skill if I were to stand a chance in landing a job outside of graphic design. So, backed all the way into the corner, I started watching tutorials and learning the basics. I knew a lot about the foundations of the industry and of the process from years of watching videos from Corridor Digital/Crew and the like. As soon as I had the drive to learn though, it seemed like nothing could stop me. I took part in “inktober,” though digitally and aptly called “blendtober,” and committed to creating and posting something every day for that month. I did the infamous donut tutorial by the BlenderGuru, and continued to post almost daily for months afterward.

While I feel comfortable enough having broken free from the bonds of debilitating anxiety, I still hold on to that irrational fear of failure. Lately, I've had so many fun ideas that, for one reason or another, I've convinced myself not to pursue. But this essay, this project… It feels so right. It truly is a *passion* project. I believe in it and want to breathe life into it—to let it become tangible and actualized for others to consume.

I want this to be the best it can be, but with that expectation comes the many mental hurdles which have been frustrating, to say the least. It has taken me far longer to write this than I had ever previously imagined. I thought I could read a couple of source texts and squirt this puppy out in a month or two over the summer, but I couldn’t even get myself to start writing until it was almost August. In the time it took to research and plan the project scope, I allowed myself to dream up this large threat of failure. What if it's not good? What if no one likes it? What if? What if? What if? But I *am* finishing it. This story has implications far greater than myself. I want to explore my values and, in so doing, tell a beautiful story of life, death, and freedom.