

### There is no formula to make a hit song.

Anrick Bregman on projects that dig deeper and the web as a repository of memories.

The expert behind our selection of digital work in this issue of Lurzer's Archive is Anrick Bregman, interactive director at unity and also part of the arts collective Tango & Hawaii. Anrick creates commercial and experimental content for the browser and the smartphone, built on a dialogue between the viewer and the story. Michael Weinzettl talked to Anrick about his career, his influences, and his philosophy.

**L.A.:** Hi Anrick, can you tell us about where you come from and how your interest in the digital medium evolved?

**Anrick Bregman:** Throughout my life, there have always been threads that were connected. It is something I am only beginning to realize but they made me as I am now. The first thread is science fiction: I was always a big fan and read many books, short stories and articles on the subject of new technologies, transhumanism, and science. The future is something that has always fascinated me. The second thread was games. When I was a teenager, I saved up and bought an Amiga and a whole universe of games opened up to me. Games taught me how you can build narratives in a non-linear way. The diversity of games I was playing showed me that we as humans love to be entertained in many different ways, and love to be surprised, and are much less genre-driven than we might think. And



Taking the tale of three Tokyo children in 2040 as storyline, the interactive anime "Attraction" alerts young people to the dangers of smoking.

the third thread is my early work in animation. When I was working as an animation director at Cartoon Network, I learned a lot about scriptwriting, about character development, and also about how to construct complex visuals from simple elements - or how visuals and sound can work together in amazingly intricate ways to express a feeling. I learned about the mechanics behind body language, and how you create human emotions out of a few lines on paper. All of these threads happened before the internet was even really a place for entertainment. But as the web started to become a platform for very simple new interactive stories, I began to get a sense that the browser had a lot of potential. I was inspired by the early creators online. An interesting question formed in my head: "Can you 'play' films?" It's too simplistic now, looking back, but it felt like a challenge. I began to play with simple experiments of my own, combining concepts from cinema and technology and techniques from games, a kind of hybrid of those two worlds. And that's when I realized, "I am in the wrong business!" and made a big push to move into digital production.

**L.A.:** You say you make interactive stories that are meant to be experienced, not just browsed. What is the secret sauce to get people involved in the story? And - perhaps even more relevant for a lot of clients/content providers - how do you even get people to their site in the first place?

**Anrick Bregman:** Making something that can be experienced, not just browsed, is what I aspire to do on every project I make. I don't always manage. I think we're all hoping to formulate a theory that explains what we do. It's in our human nature to try to rationalize our passions and ambitions. But then you realize it doesn't work in film, literature, or music either. There is no formula to make a hit song. You just have to try your best and do what you believe. During a production, I never try to construct a "hit" but just try to make something I think I'd like myself. Or what feels right. And the trick to do that is more about human psychology than it is about technology itself. One of the biggest challenges we're having in getting people to really experience something is that people are hesitant to follow a link that takes them down a little rabbit hole into a world we've created for them. People aren't expecting that a link will take them somewhere beautiful. The trust that we need for users to follow our breadcrumbs has been broken by branded spam and virus warnings, cheap advertising, and stories of brands using your information. I am not talking about people within the digital advertising industry, or within



Anrick Bregman, interactive director at unity.

the gaming community, but more about the public at large. Those who are not invested in the medium need to be convinced. I think they are innately hesitant on the internet - and I always hope that we can change that mistrust, making them start to get excited about the surprises that are waiting for them out there.

**L.A.:** Do a lot of clients come to you because they find it hard to get visits to their commercial sites?

**Anrick Bregman:** There are easier ways to get people to your commercial site than asking me to make a website for you. I make quite complex projects! I think people come to me because they are excited about what kind of experience we can build together, whether it's through an advertising agency or directly to a brand. I feel there's a sense of excitement about what it is possible to do within the browser. I love that sense of adventure on the part of brands and ad agencies. It is a huge credit to them that they are willing to experiment. They see the potential. And they want me to guide them in putting together all the puzzle pieces. A lot of the work I do complements a brand - but doesn't directly drive sales. It's not so solution-driven. That also makes it hard sometimes because the goals of a project are less clearly defined, and thus easily misunderstood. We talk a lot about managing expectations. But I look at the projects I have done and feel that they made the brand stand out positively to its consumers. They add a glow to that brand.

**L.A.:** What's your take on commercials on the web that you have to sit through before you get to the content you actually want to access? Isn't this the most primitive and annoying way on the web to try to direct people's attention to one's product?

**Anrick Bregman:** I don't believe advertising needs to block people to get noticed. People don't have a choice and so just wait desperately for that little "Skip" button to

appear. Click click click. But it's much more powerful to make something people want to watch. We are all stuck with a system that allows companies like Google or Facebook to offer a free service so we are complicit to it. "Free" is a double-edged sword. The techniques that "free" uses to get paid are annoying and counterproductive, because they make us hate advertising. And it can be great, advertising can be meaningful, memorable. Having to watch cinema ads before a movie never felt like a chore to me. Because they are made to be a spectacle.

**L.A.:** Will this ever stop?

**Anrick Bregman:** No, it will never stop - the world will never let go of advertising, and brands will always try to shove images in front of our eyes wherever we go. We are only inconvenienced by it and we sit through it, we wait. The biggest companies can employ the best and brightest of minds to figure out new and unusual ways to advertise to you. So expect the unexpected and don't be surprised if, next time you press a button in a lift, you hear a branded jingle, or if the road markings on your way to work turn out to be in the shape of a logo. Advertising is creeping its way into every part of our life and, in truth, that is sometimes a good thing (we benefit) and sometimes a bad one (we get nothing out of the deal). It's up to us to reward adventurous ads as much as possible, and that is as easy as a click.

**L.A.:** Can you tell us about some of the interactive stories you have created for clients that you are proudest of?

**Anrick Bregman:** I always try to gauge what a project gave me back versus what I put in. "Attraction" is one of my proudest projects because the message was a positive one - don't smoke - but for me personally, I got so much out of the process of directing it. I walked away with an experience that changed me. I feel lucky to have been involved, and working with one of the most talented Japanese animators of a generation was a fantastic experience. The same is true for "Find Your Way to Oz." This is a project that stretched me in terms of what I expect from myself. I put a lot into it and gave it everything I have. To create the tornado, we combined a lot of different technologies with very traditional visual cinematic techniques. It was a huge risk, it was extremely challenging, and at one point I didn't think we'd make it. Then, suddenly, everything just... fit. I'm proudest of those two projects because I went through a journey to make them, and in both cases there was cold sweat in the middle of the night. There was, perhaps, a real fear that it wouldn't work or that I'm not good enough. But then I persisted. And there were people

I collaborated with who made me better, gave me confidence. And we solved all problems we could to get to a final product that we're proud of. We got the impossible done.

**L.A.:** What is Tango & Hawaii? Why did you co-found this? In order to do more non-commercial products that you wouldn't be able to within the framework of unity? Or in what way do the projects you do for Tango & Hawaii differ from those for unity?

**Anrick Bregman:** Tango & Hawaii is an arts collective I started with a friend, Luciano Foglia, about three years ago. We had a studio together for a few years and it happened very naturally. It is a very open collaboration, without any pressure to actually finish anything if we don't want to. There's no commercial pressure behind it because we have no interest to be commissioned by anyone. How did it start? I don't think T&H was ever an effort to make something deliberately non-commercial - it wasn't a reaction against commercial work. Luciano and I also collaborate a lot on commercial projects. He was the lead designer on probably half of my works from the last seven years. So we are often mixing up our commercial and our personal works. In terms of inspiration, you give to commercial work but you also take back from it. You gain experience and knowledge from it that you can use yourself. It is a symbiotic relationship. So as we would work on a commercial project we would naturally mess around with code or with music, or just mock up different visual approaches to an idea. We are both curious about the same things. At some point we had a few simple prototypes of ideas and they felt like they would be quite good if we finished them. And that's what created projects like "Kissing," and "Format: Journey."

**L.A.:** Can you describe a project you did at Tango & Hawaii that you think is typical of your output there, as opposed to what you do for unity?

**Anrick Bregman:** "Kissing" is a good example, I think. It's a super-simple installation where the loudness of your voice causes two people on-screen to get closer and closer, and eventually kiss. By the time you are screaming they are kissing passionately, intimately. It's a project that we felt presented a paradox. The audience has to make a lot of noise to participate - and that is counterintuitive to intimacy, especially in a public space. We don't tend to make much noise in public. And yet the intensity of the kissing on-screen makes it very intimate. It's a very private moment for that couple. I think as a commercial project it wouldn't have worked. A brand would have toned it down or tried other ways to put this

together. But the installation works exactly because of that paradox between shouting and kissing. Between loudness and intimacy. The experience is very positive and fun for people, though - it is something that I wish more advertising would focus on. It's real life. People just start to laugh when they interact with it.

**L.A.:** Together with Japanese director Koji Morimoto, you've created the world's first interactive anime. Can you tell us how this worked? I understand it was part of an anti-smoking campaign for the French Ministry of Health. How did you get the kids to watch this in the first place?

**Anrick Bregman:** The project came from two young creatives at DDB Paris, who asked us to pitch for an anti-smoking campaign that would be influenced by Japanese anime, which is very popular in France. I wrote a director's treatment for that and, through our creative director at unity, Kishi, we managed to get some connections in the anime industry in Tokyo. So we decided to put Koji Morimoto forth as part of our pitch. The collaboration between him and me was very complex - because it is very complex to make a proper anime film and then turn it into an interactive experience. We had to bridge the culture barrier, the language barrier, and especially the technology barrier between our ways of working, and our teams' needs. We were very dependent on each other, and yet both used to working without restrictions in that way. To make this easier, I did almost all of



*The trailer "Find your way to Oz" engages the audience by means of interactive moments, each of which conveys a sense of the narrative of the movie.*

the technology work upfront, which was a way for me to show him and his team exactly what they should do and where their animation would fit. Initially, that created more confusion than I anticipated because I had to make a lot of assumptions that felt to him like being boxed-in. But it got much better once I had spent some time at Studio 4c in Tokyo, working with them and explaining my plans and ideas. So much of what we do is only successful because of good communication - it still amazes me to this day. But, ultimately, the project is beautiful largely due to the animation Koji Morimoto made for it. I am grateful for the energy he had and his incredible attention to detail. You can make amazing code but when you fill it with something beautiful that code gains a greater value. Together, those different elements fit like magic. We are still talking about collaborating again in the future; I hope to find a way to do that some time.

**L.A.:** Can you tell us a bit about the criteria you used in selecting digital work for this issue of Archive magazine?

**Anrick Bregman:** My criteria are really about memories. I often wonder what kind of memories we are making on the web. How long will they last? If I think back to my childhood, there are some really strong memories I have of books, television, films, and also ads. There'd be something new and amazing and you'd share it with your friends at school and giggle together about it or just wonder how the hell they made that, or what might happen next. I'm wondering these days whether online, in the

browser, we're making the same kind of memories. You have to assume that if you believe the browser is a space where you can be entertained. So I tried to choose projects that seemed memorable to me, which I might still remember ten years from now, even if - by then maybe - they doesn't exist anymore.

**L.A.:** Since we're primarily a print-based medium I need to ask you a question: Does print (as in books, newspapers, magazines, as well as in print advertising) have any chance of surviving the next 15 years?

**Anrick Bregman:** Yes, absolutely. There is plenty of proof all around us that print is still a strong medium. I can see a return to libraries: they are being renovated and re-discovered. I have deleted the newspaper apps on my phone and returned to buying newspapers (I use my phone too much anyway). Print advertising can be as powerful, funny or insightful in one single image as a whole commercial or film can be over a span of time - and you don't need Wifi to see it. Comics books are as huge as ever. Bookshops still exist and probably will continue to - I certainly do hope so because I love them. And I never lost my personal love for a printed book, whether it is full of letters or full of pictures.

**L.A.:** Can you give us examples of interactive digital work in a commercial context that you admired when you were starting out?

**Anrick Bregman:** My earliest memories of digital work that really made me sit up and take notice were mostly people's personal projects, rather than commercial ones. A great example is "The Secret Garden of Mutabor" by Yenz Schmidt. But there were many people really using code in unexpected ways. Coding was simpler then so, in a way, the platform was more open to people without much experience. That really got me interested in the web, and made me fall out of love with TV. The first commercial project I remember seeing and being blown away by is unity's own Adobe Creative Mind. That made me literally quit my job and start to look for work within the digital production industry. No joke. I felt like I had to be doing it instead of just clicking on it.

**L.A.:** How did you like this year's Cannes Grand Prix winner in Digital, where people could send in audition films to get cast in the next installment of that story? Is that, to you, an instance of successful digital storytelling?

**Anrick Bregman:** Yes, it is very much a successful product of digital storytelling. It applies a layer to a traditional story which only digital can add. I am in two minds about that particular project, though. I like it because it involves people in a very direct and literal way. But, equally, I dislike it because

it benefits only a small number of people. There are very few winners and lots of losers. And that's a shame. What I find, which is often the case with the digital advertising industry, is that we apply very clever marketing or technology solutions but I find it hard that there is no larger focus on narrative in the work that is labeled as "groundbreaking." There seems to be too little room for anything more meaningful than the latest innovation. And as I am spending more and more time online now, year after year, I am missing that strong narrative thread - even in my own work. The convention says online audiences don't have the patience, that they'll get distracted, and that there is a three-second attention span. That's why all these tricks are interesting - that's why the audition idea is appealing - but I am not the first to say it, and I won't be the last: those projects that are the most unique and most memorable are projects that tell you a great story in a surprising way. It really doesn't matter whether it's new or not, or whether you are in it or not. And I often have this doubt even about my own projects; I am not preaching here, just thinking out loud.

**L.A.:** Your work has been recognized and acclaimed at lots of award shows - in Cannes and at the D&ADs, to name but two. How important are awards to you and what are the big problems in judging work that is interactive storytelling within an awards jury context?

**Anrick Bregman:** Awards are able to give your project a real push. It gets your work noticed. It is hard enough to get projects clicked on, and there's so much out there competing for the same audience. So, to me as a director, they give my work credibility, and that helps when I am pitching a new idea to clients who don't yet know me. It gives me confidence and it's very rewarding to have your effort recognized.

I definitely get disappointed if my projects don't get that recognition. But the problem with awards often lies in the fact that it's quite easy to impress judges with case study videos that use selective data smartly. We all do that. We only want to show the best side of our work. It's not a lie and yet it's hard for judges to really understand the complexity of the work you're presenting because they go through hundreds of projects in a short compressed amount of time. And it means that, often, some of the simpler, more obvious work bubbles to the surface and those projects that go a little deeper sink to the bottom. To me, that is a shame because often - not always, but often - those projects that go a little deeper are also the more meaningful, more memorable ones.



"Kissing" is an installation with voice-controlled video designed to bring an intimate moment to an interactive context.