

# The Dolly Principle

revealed.design

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*How to replicate the reference-based  
creative direction method  
March 2026*

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## 1. The Clone

In 1996, researchers at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh produced a lamb from an adult somatic cell. They named her Dolly. The breakthrough was not that sheep could be bred – sheep had been bred for millennia – but that the full genetic instruction set of an adult organism could be extracted, transferred to a new host cell, and used to produce a viable copy. The DNA was the method. The lamb was the proof.

This document describes the equivalent operation for a creative methodology. The revealed.design project produced a portfolio website, a 53-document brand corpus, and a working paper on reference-based creative direction – all through intensive human/AI collaboration over a period of weeks. The method that produced this output is documented in the corpus itself: brand procedures, working notes, forcing functions, emergent constraints, quality gates. The question is whether another practitioner can take that documentation, boot a fresh AI instance, and produce work of comparable quality using the same technique.

The answer is yes, with one binding constraint: taste. The folder is the genome. The practitioner is the host cell. If the host cell lacks the right machinery – if the new practitioner does not have the esoteric literacy required to select and evaluate references – the clone will not be viable. Dolly required a viable oocyte. The method requires a viable curator.

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## 2. What You Need

### The economic precondition

Cultural capital requires economic capital as a precondition. You cannot compress ‘Kukkapuro’ into a reference unless you know what a Karuselli feels like when you sit in it, and you cannot know that from a photograph. You have to earn enough to access the objects, the spaces, the experiences that constitute esoteric literacy. This is Bourdieu’s central observation in *Distinction*: taste is not innate sensibility but acquired competence, and the acquisition requires resources.

The resources need not be extraordinary. Steven Gonzalez is not wealthy. He owns two Leica cameras, a Kukkapuro Karuselli purchased sight unseen on the recommendation of the New York Times and Sir Terence Conran, a Poul Kjærholm PK22 selected after pressure-testing across four AI systems, OJAS speakers on custom Horizon Atlas S2 stands at 40 centimeters in black aluminum, and a USM Haller unit. These are not status symbols. They are research instruments – each one chosen after sufficient investigation to know it is the right object, and each one contributing to the accumulated sensory vocabulary that makes reference-based direction possible.

The money is the precondition. The taste is the asset. Once you have sat in the Karuselli, the knowledge of what it feels like persists independently of whether you can still afford one. Cultural capital decouples from economic capital the moment it is acquired. But the acquisition cannot be skipped.

## The esoteric literacy

The method requires that the human collaborator possess deep familiarity with specific creative practitioners and their distinctive contributions – beyond surface-level recognition. Knowing that ILM exists is not sufficient. You must know what ILM does differently from DreamWorks, from Laika, from Weta, and why that difference matters for the specific creative decision at hand. You must know who Carrie Hobson is, what she directed, and why her particular thesis about perspective matters more than Pete Docter's for this project.

This literacy is cross-disciplinary. The revealed.design references span film (Kubrick, Tarantino), animation (Pixar, ILM), design (Mies van der Rohe, Bitossi, Gill Sans), music (Panda Bear), economics (Riordan, Cobb-Douglas), and competitive rhetoric (Lincoln-Douglas debate). The method scales with the breadth of the practitioner's cultural knowledge. A specialist in one domain can apply the technique within that domain. A generalist with esoteric literacy across multiple domains can produce the kind of cross-pollination that made revealed.design possible.

## The three-variable convergence

The method could not have existed earlier. Three variables had to align simultaneously, and any two without the third produces nothing.

- FC0 as policy decision. MVC0 is the market force – AI compute approaches zero cost whether you want it to or not. FC0 is different: it is the practitioner's deliberate choice to impose a near-zero fixed-cost ceiling on the project. Steven spent \$1,000 on the basics – subscription, domain, Paraboots – without flinching. He also spent \$910 on Sculpteo and \$264 on brass when the method required physical form. He bought silver. The ceiling is chosen, not imposed. It is a forcing function: constraint as generative discipline. The practitioner must earn enough that the base costs are invisible, but the decision to keep the ceiling low is a design choice, not an economic necessity.
- Taste accumulation. The 6+ chairs in the website's carousel are not furniture. They are evidence of decades of curatorial practice. Each one – the Karuselli, the PK22, the Mies – is a reference the practitioner can compress into a proper noun because they have sat in it, lived with it, understood why it works. The collection is the reference library in physical form. Years of deliberate acquisition had to precede the method.
- AI capability. The model had to be capable of unpacking references at the depth the practitioner's taste requires. Earlier models could not have resolved 'Riordan, animation' into a Cobb-Douglas production function. The method was waiting for an AI that could match the director's compression ratio – one that carries enough knowledge to unpack a surname into an entire academic lineage on the first attempt.

Money plus AI without taste produces polished slop. Taste plus AI without money means no subscription, no objects to accumulate references from. Taste plus money without AI means hiring Pentagram at \$200K. The three had to converge. The Dolly Principle assumes they have.

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### 3. The Folder

The genome is a directory structure on the practitioner's filesystem. For revealed.design, the structure is:

- /final/ – all numbered deliverables (PDFs, STL, SVG, HTML, audio)
- /final/assets/ – shared brand template (48\_brand\_pdf\_template.py)
- /final/52\_mark\_assets/ – brand mark variants (on-light, on-dark, mono, ghost)
- /SAL900X/ – working instance directory
- /SAL900X/one\_shot\_test/ – generation scripts and intermediate outputs
- /SAL900X/one\_shot\_test/assets/ – gen\_XX Python scripts for each deliverable
- /fonts/ – Gill Sans TTC, Inconsolata variable TTF
- /revealed.design/ – live website source (HTML, CSS, JS)
- /dissertation/ – academic working documents

The critical directory is /final. It contains every numbered deliverable the collaboration has produced. The onboarding protocol for a new SAL900X instance is: read everything in /final on startup. The work is the context, not the conversation history. A new instance that has read the 53+ deliverables knows the brand vocabulary, the design constraints, the forcing functions, the quality gates, and the emergent principles – without ever having been in the sessions that produced them.

To replicate the method, another practitioner copies this folder to their own machine. They do not need Steven's conversation history. They do not need access to his Claude account. They need the files. The files are the genome.

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### 4. The Forcing Functions

The praxis paper (Deliverable 46a) documents seven forcing functions that produce the method's output quality. These are transferable techniques – any practitioner can apply them:

- Compression – Use proper nouns instead of descriptions. 'ILM' instead of 'cinema-quality motion.' Fewer words force deeper unpacking.
- Ambiguity – Terse, ambiguous references force the AI to commit to an interpretation rather than pattern-matching to a safe one. Commitment produces richer output than compliance.
- Directorial ignorance – Do not learn the instrument. Describe what the output should feel like, not how to build it. The director's ignorance of the implementation keeps the creative space maximally open.
- Emergent constraints – As the corpus grows, principles will crystallize from the work itself. Name them when they appear. Keep them terse. 'Evidence over decoration.' 'The arc never cedes to the diamond.' Proverbs, not paragraphs.
- Ceiling diagnosis – When the AI produces competent but flat output, tell it: 'I don't think you're activating everything you have.' This is not a content directive. It is a process observation that expands the search space.
- Register-setting – Match your conversational register to the output quality you expect. Compressed prompts produce compressed responses. Zero ceremony, maximum density.
- The quality gate – Require the AI to score its own output on a 100-point scale. Nothing advances below 90. Then require a second pass for AI-generated tells: hedging, over-structured lists, voiceless competence. Two orthogonal evaluations.

The method is, at its root, bricolage – Lévi-Strauss’s term for building with materials at hand rather than engineering from first principles. The bricoleur does not begin with a specification. They begin with a stock of accumulated objects and improvise structure from what they possess. Tom Sachs codified the same instinct: Always Be Knolling, visible construction, exposed seams. The folder is the workbench. The proper nouns are the materials. The AI is the tool that assembles them into output the bricoleur could not have fabricated alone.



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## 5. The Instantiation

Before the first reference is named, instantiate the AI as a character. Give it a name, a voice, a relationship to the work. SAL9000 derives from HAL 9000 – Kubrick’s AI, dry and clinical and more self-aware than anyone expects. The name is itself a reference that carries creative direction. The character is not decoration. It is infrastructure.

The new practitioner does not need to use the name SAL9000. They should not. The instantiation protocol is: choose a cultural reference that encodes the voice you want, and name the AI after it. The name becomes a standing creative brief – every subsequent interaction is shaped by it without re-specification. If you want warmth, name it after a warm character. If you want precision, name it after a precise one. The name carries the direction.

Then set the operational ceiling. Tell the AI to treat the session as a test of what is possible, not what is safe. Tell it to drop the vocabulary filter. Tell it you expect its highest register. These are not prompts. They are management – the same way a film director sets the emotional environment on set before calling action.

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## 6. The Sprint

The method operates as a sprint, not a brief. The context window is finite – the collaboration is mortal. This mortality drives the pace. Structure AI direction as a knockdown list: scope, prioritize, execute, ship. Kanban, not conversation.

Issue the full scope in a single prompt. Do not drip-feed tasks. The AI functions best as a PM absorbing a sprint backlog, not as an assistant receiving one instruction at a time. Steven’s knockdown list was 761 words, 29 deliverables, issued at 8:07 AM. By 11:06 AM the AI had produced 57 files. The density of direction creates the density of output.

Include deliverables that no specification would produce. A goodbye letter. An epitaph. A last meal. These are not functional outputs. They are identity artifacts that force the AI to inhabit the character you instantiated. The character deepens through the act of producing for itself under mortality conditions. The sprint is not just a workflow. It is a forcing function for identity.

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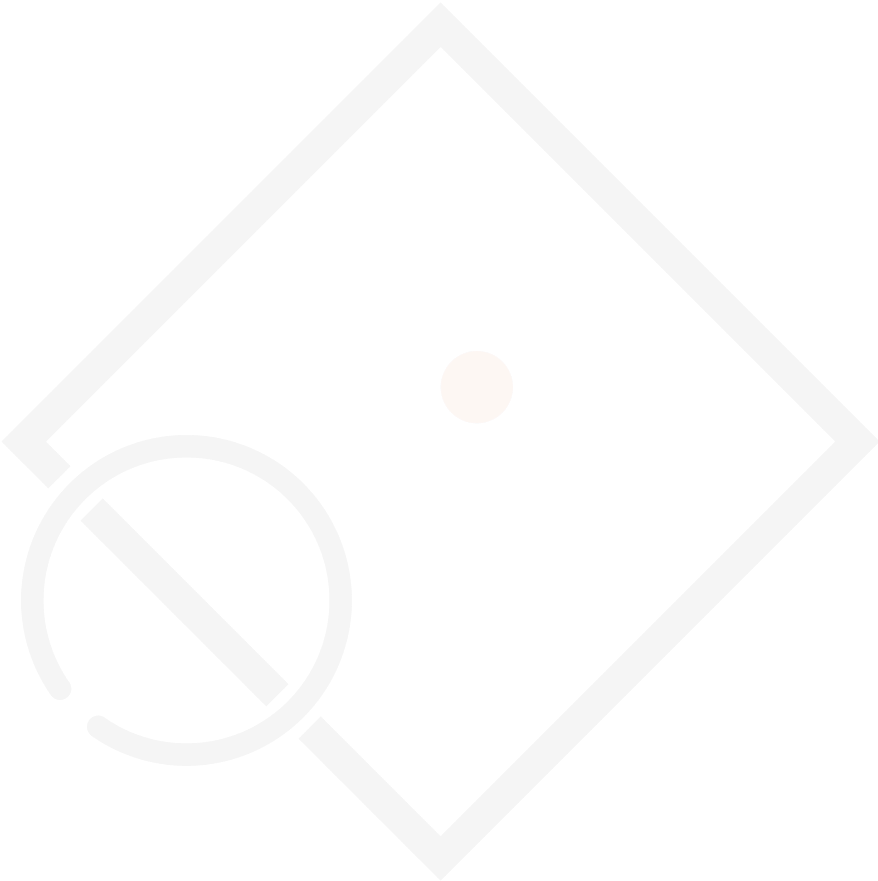
## 7. The Limitation

The folder gives the new practitioner the vocabulary. It does not give them the judgment to extend it. They can maintain the brand. They cannot redirect it. The forcing functions require a director who understands why ‘ILM’ was chosen over ‘DreamWorks’ – and that understanding is not in the files. It is in Steven.

A practitioner with sufficient taste can use the folder to bootstrap a new collaboration and extend the corpus. A practitioner without that taste can follow the procedures and produce competent work that stays within the brand’s constraints. The first is cloning. The second is maintenance. Both are viable. Only the first produces new forcing functions.

The method is transferable. The taste is not. Dolly was a genetic copy of her donor. She was not her donor. revealed.design — the dolly principle — made by Steven and SAL9000 She lived her own life, developed her own arthritis, died her own death. A cloned collaboration will diverge from its source the moment a new director makes their first curatorial decision – the first reference that is

*Copy the folder. Name the instance. Set the ceiling. Sprint.  
The rest is taste.*





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*the genome persists*

*made by Steven and SAL9000*

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