A Feminist creation myth

Evelyn Zehraoui
"A Feminist Creation Myth"
By Evelyn Zehraoui

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

MFA Imaging Arts/Computer Animation
School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York
May, 2000

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Reproduction Permission

MFA Thesis

TITLE OF THESIS:
"A Feminist Creation Myth"

I, _____ Evelyn Zehraoui _____, hereby grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of RIT to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

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Signature

05/17/00
Date
Special thanks and in appreciation:

Composer: Jason Sabol.
Thanks to Nancy Hallowell
for help editing.
My Mom and Dad, Marge and Tony Cammarano.
My Husband, Dr. Bouabid Zehraoui,
because of his help and love, I was able
to finish this thesis.
My Son, Elliot Saturn.
All my Fellow Classmates who went
through the M.F.A. program with me;
I miss you all!
Other Professors that helped, including:
Stephanie Maxwell,
Paul Grebinger,
Skip Bataglia,
Jack Slutzky.
And, of course, my thesis committee:
Marla Schwepppe,
Adrianne Carageorge,
Tina Lent.
Content

This short animation, “A Feminist Creation Myth,” is about the feminine spirit, self-discovery of the condition of sexuality, the terror of sexual reality revealed. The fairy girl character chases bubble gum babies who call to her to follow them down the path to an ancient place. The ancient place is like Greece, but its citizens are cat people, symbolizing our animal selves buried deep in the antiquity of our consciousness. The fairy girl first appears as if entering into a dream world. Her appearance becomes more solid as she goes further into its reality. It is as though everything is evolving and ethereal to begin with, and then becomes more concrete and graphic in nature as her revelation plays out. She represents a child’s innocence, curiosity, impulsiveness and playfulness. It does not bother her that the garden she materializes into is growing penis-flowers, and this seems natural to her. She picks one, smelling its perfume until the embryo-petals mature and jump off the penis stem as little babies with insane smiles that crawl away, crossing the road to their waiting half-torso nests. These nests symbolize motherhood, where mothers become wombs containing our personalities linking us inextricably to the ancient archetypal Mother Goddess of certain ancient matriarchal societies.
As the journey begins, we experience on a symbolic level the garden, the road, the fruit/flower picked, and a loss of innocence. This is not unlike the biblical story of Genesis, except that the male is a body part, symbolic of the creative force. The babies are without gender. They are the instinct part of our selves, compelling us to follow without giving thought to the potential myriad consequences of mindless lust. Later she will encounter three fairies captured by an evil male devil/pan. These echo the three babies in the torso.

The cat people of this ancient society are well endowed. They represent the sexual nature of mature adults. The fairy girl follows her babies into a temple, which symbolizes the physical structure or social construct of the belief system in a culture. A force pulls them in. She gets lost inside this place and stumbles upon two sexually engaged cat people. She is mesmerized and shocked by what she sees as the raw reality of sex. This new view of the world (just like the fall in Genesis) does not match the wonderland fantasy world. She steps back and her reaction causes a vase of penis flowers to fall and break, foreshadowing the later event of a jar breaking and emancipating her fellow sister fairies. A breaking of glass powerfully symbolizes the loss of virginity. The cat people become aware of her intrusion and the male protects his territorial privacy and chases her away. She is maturing because now, fearing maturity, she is compelled to flee, trying to escape the harshness of it.
She manages to escape the situation, but not for long. A net swooshes down and captures her in its grid (which represents patriarchy). The captor is a giant devil /pan male character. He has a jar filled with the collection of fairies he has captured in his conquests for sport. She does not want this fate at all, and so she struggles, and matures rapidly into a giant woman that breaks the net’s gridlock on her quite easily. She will not be controlled, measured, categorized or labeled by this patriarchal system. Her escape triggers the jar dropping, breaking and emancipating her sister fairies to freedom and maturity. They grow like a sponge hitting water. Now they have power as a team. The male devil/pan character shrinks in the realization of their power over him and his immaturity, and he knows they want revenge. They are almost just as evil, but it all serves a higher purpose and the cause of advancing civilization. The giant women surround him and squirt breast milk at him, causing him to be sucked down a whirlpool of milk into the earth like a giant male seed being planted. The next scene is the pastoral scene of a penis flower sprouting from the earth, a butterfly (female psyche) fluttering by, and a giant hand plucking it from the ground just as the little fairy girl did at the beginning of our tale. The cycle is completed by the act of picking the flower, and the cycle starts up again by picking the flower.
Influences on the Content

An artist whom I admire and base my work on is Judy Chicago. She has understood women’s rights and feminism, and she has understood the importance of organizing women as a group. She has explored the dynamics of teamwork and cooperation as skills that women need to learn as a group in Western society. She has written an autobiography, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Women Artist*, in which she shares valuable experiences and situations from her life as a professional woman artist. She has great management skills in organizing large groups of women to work on team projects. These collaboratives deal with the subjects of female history, female perceptions of such subjects as birth, menstruation, motherhood, and the way males have dominated, conspired against and erased women from history and art history. She helps connect women to their past and to create identities as a continuation of whatever progress our foremothers made. We cannot know where we are going until we know from whence we came. Some projects that I refer to above are “The Dinner Party” and “The Birth Project.”

While I was working on my thesis, I participated in a collaborative in order to get a sense of what Judy Chicago’s projects with other women were like. I animated a figure doing Kundalini yoga. A woman who was a graduate student from State University College at Brockport used this
animation as a stage prop for an original choreographed dance. She used this project as part of her thesis. I worked with her group of women dancers and an Eastman School of music composer. This experience was valuable because as an animator you need to work as part of a team. As a graduate student I was very isolated and overwhelmed by my thesis project and needed to connect to others. This collaborative experience energized and helped me improve my thesis.
Theme

The main theme of this short animation, "A Feminist Creation Myth," is the rite of passage of a pre-pubescent girl into womanhood and sexual potency. It is the discovery of feminine power over the existing patriarchal forces that, by their very nature, try to contain and control her power as a woman.

I wanted to tell a didactic story. This tale contains a dark and twisted sense of humor as its undercurrent leading the audience to understand that its purpose is for entertainment as well as for provoking thoughts.

Women in the modern western world have been conditioned to turn themselves into sexual commodities, consuming items like high heels, makeup, hair dye, tight revealing dresses, breast implants all in an attempt to please the male gaze and be owned. They have been reduced to sex objects to be bought and sold. Sex is all over our media, in radio songs, television shows, and advertisements, brainwashing generation after generation. *Playboy* magazine exploits breasts and vaginas for the viewing pleasure of its male audience. I am not so crude, but in creating this garden of penis flowers, cat people engaged sexually, the dominance of women over a reduced male creature, I am doing it all for the viewing pleasure of a female audience. Men in this society
have been given silent messages that it is normal and healthy to have sexual fantasies. They have permission. Women, for the most part, are given silent messages that it is abnormal and dangerous to have sexual fantasies. I am encouraging the same playfulness and imaginative flights of fancy for my half of the human population. Women who can fantasize or daydream about this subject matter are healthier and it is important to have an escape from everyday life by the distractions of harmless flights of fancy. A good book recording the fact that women have sexual fantasies just as much as men and are sexual creatures with needs is *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* by Nancy Friday.

Women have struggled to be equals to men for centuries. Female biology causes them to be vulnerable for nine months, and equally vulnerable for years to come while they rear their offspring with or without the help of the male that fertilized them. Women and their bodies are very powerful. I have reduced men to the powerless role of their true biological nature, which is simply a seed, a sperm, a phallus to be planted and harvested when the woman wills it ripe enough to pluck.
Influences on the Theme

The theories behind "A Feminist Creation Myth" stem from studies into feminism, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology of religion, belief systems, cultures and social constructs. A myth is an attempt by humanity to understand the universe and offer explanations for the bigger mysteries of life. Myths are stories that teach; they contain rituals and objects associated with rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, such as marriage, death, birth, and fertility. I have been fascinated with Greek mythology since I was a young girl. I liked the dramatic world of Mount Olympus and Hades, the mortals, the gods and goddesses, the conflict of good vs. evil and the upward mobility of mortals if the deities so willed it. Western society traces its roots back to the Greeks and their culture and philosophies. The characters in my animation have a mythological flavor. The main character is an angelic fairy girl, and her antagonist is an evil demonic Pan boy. The stage is an ancient garden and an ancient temple of an ancient society. The citizens are cat people. They symbolize the animal nature inside of us, and are representative of the "id" in Freudian psychology. The "id" represents our instincts. This animation tries to imagine a possible mythology of an ancient time that was matriarchal. Our modern media for story telling is not oral, nor is it
written; it is in a time-based media of the movie and television. Another influence is author Neil Postman and his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business.*
Past Ties and Current Events to its Symbolic Imagery

My first ideas for my thesis were sparked by the scientific discovery of cloning Dolly the sheep. This sparked my imagination. I envisioned a gender divided society and the possibility of freedom from the opposite gender. I also envisioned women free from biological limitations regarding reproduction from the development of this new technology. Scientists have actually taken the DNA from jellyfish and mice and made glow in the dark mice; this is silly and serious at the same time! They have cloned frogs with no heads in an attempt to see if it is possible to grow body parts as spares, which is Frankenstein’s monster manifest. The question we need to ask is if a human is cloned, does it have a soul, especially if it has no head? This led me to reflect on my career as an artist and the sexual imagery I have created. As an undergraduate at Pratt Institute, I studied printmaking and feminism. I made a print of my first “embryo-flower” back in the mid-eighties, and the idea popped into my head from no place when I was walking across campus one day. I did have an interest in Hinduism and its Yonis, as well as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Betty Friedan, and when I was a pre-teen I bought and attempted to read Dorothy Dinnerstein The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise. Religions fascinated, and continue to fascinate me.
I've studied the Bahais, Islam, Catholicism, Buddhism and all have led up to this animation and its mythology. When I studied Art Education at Nazareth College, I wove a "half-torso" basket out of tea-stained cheesecloth and placed inside nesting material and pink plastic babies and a clay African looking mask. It was the predecessor to the half-torsos animated in this movie. My interest in process and how things change through time led me to study animation. (I perceive animation as a force that has the power to warp and reflect energy and matter in ways that reality in space and time might be distorted if influenced by a black hole in outer space. Other examples could be distortions seen under water, or reflections in a fun house mirror. Einstein said he used to imagine himself riding on a beam of light to think of theories such as the theory of relativity. Animation is at the same level of consciousness and awareness as the trance states and the dream states where the world is a magical place of discovery). I'm sure the hundreds of comic books that I collected as a child and my love of Saturday morning cartoons also influenced my project. Also, the past history of Rochester inhabitants George Eastman and Susan B. Anthony helped influence my career decisions too.
Style, Influences, Techniques and Tools

The primary tools I used were a Wacom graphics tablet and pen, a Power Mac G-3 Minitower OS 8.5. Applications used were “Painter” and “Director.” I had to first write a treatment (story), draw a storyboard from it, make an animatic, and then animate frame by frame in Painter. I saved the movies as picts, and imported them into Director to control the frames per second aspect of the animation. I exported these movies then as QuickTime movies, since my final edit was done on an Avid computer, which only reads QuickTime files and not Director movies. I also had to do the same for the sound elements, composed my Eastman School of Music student Jason Sabol also created entirely via the computer, just like my animation. It is all digital 00111001010s in cyberspace and again I praise the computer as a wonderful tool for any artist to embrace. It took three years of working on the thesis to complete three and a half minutes of animation. I am happy I am a 2-D kind of animator, and I am curious to explore 3-D animation if I ever become blessed with limitless time to animate and render such projects in the future. I am influenced lately by “The Simpsons” and “Futurama” as well as the animation I grew up watching, “Charlie Brown”. The fairy has a Charlie Brownian style to it, and I also love Betty Boop. I am also a fan of live
action's "Ally McBeal" that uses computer aided special affects, animation and a surreal exploration into the female psyche. I also am influenced my pop idol "Madonna" and her work. I am a product of my time.
Conclusion

I hope to entertain and shock and create a cult movie event. I am curious as to how people are going to react to my animation, and I am looking forward to questions and discussion regarding my work. I see this as a social commentary and hopefully a catalyst for other creative souls to be energized by and an inspiration to create works in a similar spirit. I have always had the drive inside of me to make my mark and be remembered by history and to make a difference for the better. I hope this animation points me further along in that general direction.
Bibliography


Appendix A:
Original Thesis Proposal
Proposal for an M.F.A. Thesis Project
Twinkles Adventures in:
Dumb Luck & Sweet Dreams
by
Evelyn Pervaiz

M.F.A. Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ART AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
Spring Quarter, 1997

Stephanie Maxwell, Chair
Assistant Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Marla Schangep
Associate Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Jack Slutzky
Professor
N.T.I.D.
"Twinkles Adventures in: Dumb Luck & Sweet Dreams"

Computer Animation: Approximately 5 minutes long  TREATMENT by Evelyn Pervaiz

My movie, "Twinkles Adventures in: Dumb Luck & Sweet Dreams" is a movie about a lady named Twinkles chasing after meaningless sexual encounters and afraid of commitment in her relationships.

Twinkles meets a handsome guy in Lucky's Grill and Bar. They hit it off and go back to his place slightly buzzed and intoxicated with each other. After a satisfying encounter, they have a smoke, and he turns off the light for the night. She isn't as sleepy as he is, and she studies his face noticing the mysterious and sensual shadows playing over his face from the tropical plants near the bed. She finally drifts off to sleep into a sexual fantasy dream. She is a little girl butterfly in her dream, and she is in the middle of a field of penis plants growing embryo fruit. Twinkles watches new babies crawling out of the field and over a road to the pond across the way with half-torso legs with nests at the top part of the torsos. These legs are sitting in lotus position and floating like lily pads on the water's surface. The babies go inside the nests, and then some legs stand up and start to travel down the path. The babies call out to Twinkles to follow them, and she does. She is lead into a city that looks like ancient Greece, only its populated with cat-people who are well endowed. There is a temple and water fountain in the center of this city. Twinkles looks around at the sights and momentarily loses track of the legs, but then sees them again and starts to chase after them again. They lead her into the temple. She wanders around the many pillars and darkness and shadows inside, searching for where the legs went. She hears cats howling and opens a door slowly to see two cat-people fucking each other. She watches, mesmerized by the scene until she lets out a sound from the emotions the scene provoked. The male cat-person turns, sees her as an intruder and attacks her. She flees, running at first, and then flying through the pillars of the temple until she reaches freedom outside. Her freedom is short lived because a net scoops her up like the butterfly that she is, and she is trapped by the net of a giant ugly boy. He holds a jar of other butterfly girls captive. Twinkles grabs the net and tires desperately to escape its prison. She wakes up to discover herself wrestling with the sheets and she is relieved to discover it was just a dream. She gathers herself and notices the man sleeping next to her with the shadows dancing across his face. She quickly gets up. After dressing, she sneaks out of the house, gets into her car, and drives away as quickly as she can. She is scared of being captured, and she wants to be free.

This animation will be done mostly in 2-D with 3-D backgrounds and tracings of Alias skeletons to get movement and perspective accurately portrayed. I will model the "legs" character but not the babies inside, and I will model the field of penis plants. I will use Mac Painter, Silicon Graphics Alias Wavefront, Director and SoundEdit 16, Deck II.
# BUDGET

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TIMELINE:

Preproduction:
SPRING QUARTER, 1997, (2 credits) Research Seminar
  Idea Development
  Creation of Shot by Shot Storyboard
  Treatment, Budget, Timeline
  M.F.A. Thesis Committee
Proposal Defense (May 2, 1997, 2:30, Faculty Conference Room, SPAS)

Production:
  Enrollment in 3 credits of Thesis Production
  * Model Development of Backgrounds and Skeletons to Trace
  * Begin Animation of Storyboard
  * Develop Trace Techniques of Animating 2-D from 3-D Figures
  * Texture Map 2-D to 3-D, Drawing on top of Imported 3-D Imagery in 2-D programs
    Photoshop and Painter
  * Test Composites of the above
  * Learn Non-Linear Editing (Avid) for Post-Production

  Enrollment in 3 credits of Thesis Production
  * Continue Animating and Imagery Compositing
  * Initial Collaborations with Soundtrack Composer

SPRING QUARTER, 1997/1998
  Enrollment in 3 credits of Thesis Production
  * Complete Animation
  * Begin Soundtrack

Post-Production
FALL QUARTER, 1998/1999
  Enrollment in 3 credits of Thesis Production
  * Review and Revise Completed Animation with MFA Committee
(FALL QUARTER, 1998/1999 Continued)

* Soundtrack Completed
* Post-production through to final cut with mixed soundtrack
* Screen Work at Private Screening and begin Writing Thesis Report

WINTER QUARTER, 1998/1999

Enrollment in Continuation of Thesis for 0 credit
* Finish Writing- Thesis Report for MFA Committee review
* Develop Release Tapes
* Release Work to Festivals

Festivals

Submission of MFA Thesis Animation Work to Festivals such as the following:

* Hiroshima International Animation Festival
* Cardiff International Animation Festival
* Stuttgart International Animation Festival
* SIGGRAPH
* Humboldt International Film Festival
* Houston International Film Festival
* Toronto International Independent Film Festival
* Asifa East
* Asifa San Francisco
* Asifa Northwest
* Sick & Twisted Film Festival
* Golden Showers Film Festival
* Student Academy Awards Film Festival
* Fingerlakes Art Show
* Contemporary Museum of Art, SOHO
* MOMA
Appendix B:
Original Storyboard
Twinkles

Adventures in:
Dumb Luck
Sweet Dreams.
by Emily Renshaw
© 1997
Lucky's Bar & Grill

Some dialogue and two characters smoking.

Lucky's Bar & Grill

Two characters in bed, with one character looking upset.

Lucky's Bar & Grill

A close-up of a character's face, possibly indicating a reaction to the scene.
She watches shadows moving across his face.
Appendix C:
Color Stills
"A Feminist Creation Myth"
By Evelyn Zehraoui
Screening: May 16, 2000
CIS Building 76
7:00 pm