2005

Branches

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Branches

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PHILOSOPHY

An entire lifetime, with all of its possibilities, mistakes, triumphs, dead ends, is to be illustrated within this 40 second piece. The story will begin with birth and end with death as a rebirth. The idea, boiled down from the premise behind Pura Vida, is to illustrate the directions in which we may lead ourselves based on our choices, some may take us far from our potential, many paths will wind and dissect and converge, some will end abruptly, some will twist and turn and fork. Through it all is the thread that is Pura Vida, that is you at your purest. The character is drawn to that though she doesn’t know it. She hurts when she veers to far from it. As is the case with every potential path she may walk, Pura Vida is there always.

The various worldlines, which begin and end in one singular point, will branch and expand and intersect in between. The decisions of each version of himself will instantaneously affect his other lives, they are interdependent. At each singularity, the process begins again, this expansion as possibilities become realities. And the collapse as possibilities are exhausted and worldlines whither. All of these various lives being lived, make up a whole and that is what we are following, that is the character. But what keeps the process going is the central thread.

With each iteration, as lessons are learned, convictions are born, compromised, and again realized, this ever expanding/collapsing entity will tighten upon itself as it is inevitably drawn inward, focused, until it is one pure worldline, undivided.

The story will take place within the context of a character kicking a rock down a road. I intend to capture that feeling one has when he or she does this, that complete focus one has on that rock. There is a clarity of thought here, during this period, when we are entirely ourselves. The film will begin with the rock being kicked, a singular moment of purity that will represent birth. It will end with the next kick. In this sense it will end at the beginning.

In between is where the story will take place, when the character watches the rock come to rest, and begins the focused journey toward the rock to do it all over again. At the center of this we will watch the character, casually but with clarity, simply walk toward the rock.

During this walk, we will watch his life branch and expand as different versions of himself make different choices, leading him and different directions. Scores of his selves will branch with increasing repetition. it will occur rhythmically, in synch with the underlying music. We will see watch this character give birth to his various possibilities, and we will watch them express their differences through the distinct emotions with which they are animated.
Quiet, black screen....the sound of a rock being kicked, we hear it slide across the ground as it rests in front of the camera...when it comes to rest we cut to wide shot of main character staring at it from a distance of roughly 10 yards.

Vocals begin, As they do, various ghosted versions of the character are emitted from his body in sync with the sound. Each is a version of himself but who has chosen another direction. In the beginning they push him this way and that. He falls, unable to cope. he gains his balance and runs in fear.

One steps out of him and walks in another direction, one races out of him in a sprint. Another steps out and stops to peer around, another races toward the rock. These versions exist in their own world, and as such do not obey the gravity that he must. The walk upside down, sideways. The fly, float.

The drum begins and the character walks forward. In synch with the continuing vocals, more of him selves step out. Some taking giant exsaggerated leaps forward as they advance on the rock, others sneaking of to the side, one is dancing, one steps out, another lies down to take a nap.

Bass begins and intensity increases. Secondary characters just lean out of him, looking at him, some jump out, turn around and try to stop him, he walks right through, that ghost turns to look then walks away dejected, Some run away jumping and cheering, others depressed, some proud, arrogant, others afraid, shy, angry.

As we approach the final stanza, his fear of these versions of himself turns to confidence as he realizes that they can in fact support him. He reaches out, grabbing hold of one character after another, until he holds them all and throws them into his future. He takes off, leaping into the air. His versions reach for him, hold him, swing him forward. He continues his journey, now with the help of his versions, himself.

As he approaches the rock, the bass, and drum stops, versions of himself now flow toward him in a tide wave, the last vocal is drawn out, stretched to extend for a moment..then nothing.

Character walks off screen.
APPENDIX A
Proposal Items

Project will involve 1 main character, along with roughly 50 alternate versions. The main character will kick a rock from point A to point B as described in the Philosophy and Treatment sections.

In between kicks, during the journey, alternates will eject from him creating their own paths.

The scene will be a visual exercise, a dance, in that all of the ejections and actions of his surrounding versions will be precisely timed and choreographed. Reflections will add another visual layer to the dance.

I’ve logged the exact timing of each alternate ejection as it is called for by the chosen music, to which the animation will be tightly synced.

Here you can see the precise timing and general direction that each alternate will obey for the first two stanzas. The timing for later stanzas should be simple to ascertain simply by extrapolating these numbers.

The “action” phase of the project will take place within this 30 second window.

In this image you can see the precise direction that each character will follow within the environment, which will be a dark tube.

Alternates will obey the laws of gravity to varying degrees. Therefore some will walk on the ceiling while others hang, fall, or float.

In the upper area I’ve included a graph which indicates how long the version will appear on screen. Again timing for later stanzas can easily be extrapolated from this data.
Before beginning any of the animation. The precise timing of ejection for each of the over 50 character versions had to be determined, based on the vocal beats in the music that they would be synced to.

The beats were recorded, translated into frames, and then a unique character file was created for each version.

Exact launch, peak, and landing times were recorded. That data was later applied in animation.

After the timing and direction was set, I took this data and applied it to my Character animation file in 3D. I drew curves in 3D space, one for each character alternate. You can see the root character walking in the middle. I would later use these curves to help direct the action of the secondary characters during animation.

3D tests were created to get a feel for how the piece would unfold, aesthetically but also in terms of character to character interaction.

Since the number of characters on screen increases rapidly. Each versions movement had to be planned in advance, to avoid any unexpected interaction.

Since this project was more about animating than perhaps any other facet of 3D, I put the character through several animation tests in order to determine how the deformations held up under more extreme conditions.
Although the original concept called for an environment that consisted of a simple black reflective Tube, within which the action would take place. I tested various different looks and was very close to settling on the white tube pictured here.

The most significant technical challenge was to time the secondary characters' ejections so as to synch with the vocal track. Ejection points, peak points, and landing points were all meticulously timed in preproduction.

In all roughly 50 secondary characters were animated. Care was taken not only in the timing but also to ensure none of the characters existed in the same place at the same time.

Use of Maya's Vector Renderer was considered for final output. The cartoon like image picture here was appealing but in the end I chose Maya's default Software Renderer. I colored the tube in which the action takes place black. The final result was a much cleaner image than the Vector Renderer provided.

I did use the Vector Renderer for the rock itself as I felt the white outline brought attention to the rock, giving it a special status that prevented it from being easily overlooked.
APPENDIX C
Production Items

The vast majority of the production time on this film was spent animating. With over 50 characters to animate, and with the tight syncing that was required, the challenge was extraordinary.

The primary concerns, with respect to the animation, were A) quality of animation, B) timing of animation and C) preventing unwanted intersections. As each character was animated as its own scene file, I was concerned that some characters may exist in the same place, at the same time. With over 50 characters it would be difficult to prevent without meticulous planning.

The first technique employed to prevent such intersections was to create stills showing the path each character would take in the final scene. Below you can see the first frames of each of the ejected secondary characters in one segment of the animation. This enabled me to get a clear picture of the direction each secondary character would move in, and plan in order to avoid collision with others. The path of the main character is not shown but runs straight through the middle in this segment.

As the paths of the secondary characters were animated more thoroughly, still representations like this became more complicated, eventually leading to a web of paths. This visual technique worked well in enabling me to animate while being sure that the motion of one character would not impede another.
Animation was completed in passes, with each pass consisting of further refinement. This method enabled me to have a "complete" if not polished film early on, allowing me to choose which elements to refine, and to what degree, based on time on screen.

An initial concern was that the sheer volume of animating to be done somewhat inhibited how refined the animation could be. Clearly with fewer characters more care could be placed into the animation of each character.

I was, however, able to animate each of the characters to a fair level of refinement. As it turned out, I may have over animated most of the secondary characters as their screen time was so brief that the audience was probably unable to appreciate the care that was put into its movements. Had I considered this from the beginning I may have spent less time animating the expelled versions, and more time on the main character himself, particularly in the final segment of the film.

Reflections on the inner surface of the tube were employed to add another dimension of movement to the piece. Ejection points, peak points, and landing points were all planned and employed in order to provide a visual representation of the underlying sound.

In order to keep the frame from becoming too cluttered, specific characters with a lot of air time (versus ground time), were selectively chosen to be rendered without reflections
APPENDIX C
Production Items (cont.)
In the end, I am satisfied, though not ecstatic, about the final result. The film does closely resemble the idea as originally conceived and I believe I accomplished my goal, though deficiencies remain.

I am comfortable enough with the animation. Certainly several points exist throughout the film that could use some refinement. Particularly the last segment is not as refined as I would like. The texturing, though simplistic, is not a major focus of the film and so I am satisfied with its current state.

The primary deficiency as I see it is in cinematography, particularly lighting and camera placement. I feel quite certain that a more confident eye than mine could set up a series of camera angles and edits that would bring much more out of the film. Similarly a lighting expert could blanket the film with a consistent mood and feel that I feel it currently lacks.

If these concerns bring me to any conclusion it is one in favor of collaborative work over individual projects. I feel strongly that somewhere in there is a very strong film. My strengths, however, are limited and as a result so is the final film. Would this have been a collaborative project, as is the case with most of the work I see at RIT, I think it would have benefitted tremendously from the unique talents of each participant. As its stands now certain facets where and individual lacks skill will tend to drag the quality of a film down.

I see 3D as a type of art where collaboration is essential, unlike painting or writing for instance. I liken it more to architecture where a team of skilled workers must pool their talents in order to make something great.

So in this respect, though slightly disappointed at what I believe “Branches” could have been, I am quite satisfied with what I made of it with the limited skill set I posses. It was a wonderful, very challenging and rewarding experience. Thank you for the opportunity. I hope to build on what I have learned at RIT in years to come.