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Sift the Rabble
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A boy walks alone across a barren space. He occasionally comes across piles of junk and explores them. He pulls a broken cross from the rubble and has a duel against an invisible opponent. He pulls out a book and quickly pockets the treasure. He takes a nap on a flag and plays checkers with pocket change. It is a look at the world through the eyes of a young boy. This is the film I proposed in May of 2005.

It is not the film I screened in March 2007.

The development of this film's premise was very organic. With all of my work, I start out with a basic idea that I really don't expect to resemble the end result. I use that as a jumping off point to get to work on the real story. I continue working on the story all the way through production. My storyboards contain segments of the film, but with certain holes in them. Sometimes I don't settle on how an actual shot will play out until the sequences before and after that shot are completed. This way I can really see what will work there. So the work flow looks scattered, but allows for a natural development of the story and cinematography.

This film's original idea was a product of its timing. I had just finished very stressful work on a two quarter film. The multiple characters and complex backgrounds were frustrating and tedious. It took so much time to animate seven characters. I felt the need to do something simpler. So I wrote a script for one character. The setting was also going to be simpler. The background would exist only when deemed necessary for the action. There was no real story reason for this. I just didn't want to do the extra work. The drawing of the animation would account for the bulk of the work. There would be no need for textures.
So while the technical aspects of the proposal were solid in theory, the content side of things was still very shaky. There was no discernible plot, only symbolic gestures strung together haphazardly. And what obvious symbols they were. A cross used as a sword. Is it a symbol of religion inciting violence? I believe the part about sleeping on a flag was to show the absurdity of nationalism. And what to make of the boy tossing aside all the metallic objects while keeping with him (of all things) a potato? This was a pathetic (not to mention disgusting) attempt to show the virtues of natural things over man made constructs. This was to be ironic given that the last line of my proposal says I want to take time with my story “because I want to avoid obvious stereotypes and things done a hundred times before”.

As the weeks passed it was clear the plot was lacking. There was nothing holding these little scenes together. I couldn't see a point to why anything was happening. There were holes all over the place. I spent a long time going over the script again and again. But nothing really moved me. The content problems made getting started on the storyboards difficult as I could only envision a couple of disconnected scenes: a sword fight here, some drumming there, nothing concrete.

Deciding to focus only on the visual components. I drew some of the shots as I saw them, paying no attention to the story surrounding them. This is where I started to hone in on the design for the boy. I soon found he needed to be very expressive and gestural, since there would be no dialog. The character needed to be old enough to be naturally thinking of complex things like subterfuge and girls. But he also needed to be young enough for playing make-believe in the first place. Ten or eleven seemed to be the ideal age. So I created a boy who was kind of tall, but with long lanky
limbs. His height would give him more of a presence than a younger child, his limbs would make him a bit awkward and his wide open face would keep his youth intact. My one major concern with this design was the number of actions he had to accomplish. Running, jumping, fighting, tumbling, all these things are easier to draw with a rounder, shorter character. Not just easier but less time consuming. At one point I considered lower his age to allow a smaller character. But story won out over technical concerns. This one boy had to carry all the content since he was almost always the only character on the screen. As luck would have it, this decision would later work in my favor.

At this time I also planned for how the junkyard setting should work. Collage with found pictures was one idea. Another was much like my original proposal with almost no delineation except where absolutely necessary. One of the early drawings was of a shot that is in the final cut of the film. It shows the boy in silhouette tromping across the top of a junk heap as the sun sets behind him.

This shot struck a deep cord with me. I immediately saw the actions he took, wandering his way across the mound. I began to work out how he would get in and out of this scene. I really loved the ending that led to him finding a rusted out old car. The boy enters it and proceeds to imagine a late night drive through the city streets. This seemingly innocent pleasure cruise leads into a car race with another sports car owner. It ends with him driving of the overpass as the rusted car in real life starts to teeter off the end of the scrap heap. The boy must exit carefully to keep (he thinks) from getting crushed.
Coming up with this scene was pivotal in the creative process, even if the car was not used in the final film. It proved that simple undefined backgrounds were not going to carry the action as I originally wanted. It was also the first indication that the setting would change as the boy thinks up new adventures. The driving importance behind these adventures would not be symbolism, but just what he finds to be fun. Here is where the script really began to resemble the finished work. A boy wanders through a scrap heap, finding interesting objects or spaces. Whenever something grabs his attention, his mind takes him to another place. And these places would change styles as he entered. This is where my character design decisions earlier in the process paid off.

If the boy had been any younger (and therefore smaller), he would have needed a severe redesign for each scenario to bring him up to par with his surroundings. After all he imagines himself a believable spy/cowboy/X-games star. If he had been a three-foot, seven year old, the changes between reality and make-believe would have been dramatic. But with a four and a half foot eleven year old it was more like a slight alteration. He just needed to become a bit taller and slightly more muscular. The biggest difference is in the spy section where his shoulders are much broader. The other nice thing is that with costume changes, I could hide the design alterations so they wouldn't really be perceptible to the audience.

The time he spends in reality would most closely resemble my usual drawing style. This way, no matter how different the style for the daydreams got, everything would always lead back to what was more natural. It was a good place to go back to because it was just more natural for me to draw: dynamic holds and textured color for the character. This was the first time I would be
drawing a whole film into the computer. Getting used to the tablet took time, but it was necessary. The amount of time saved was astronomical and it bypassed several possible technical problems. My one major concern was the film looking too digital. I didn't want everything looking like a flat Flash animation. So I developed a way to add textures and shading to the character in Photoshop (see appendix).

In terms of the background, I went in the opposite direction of character animation. Instead of detailed collage for the scrap heaps, I decided to keep the piles of junk ambiguous until the boy reads something into them. Otherwise viewers might spend a lot of time guessing what they can see in the pile or distracted by the overwhelming detail. With this setup I could direct their eyes exactly where I wanted them. In a space of bland shapes, they'll focus on the one place I want them too. It also lent itself to some subtle symbolism. As “adults”, we see meaningless piles of junk. But the boy sees potential and adventure. It makes sense that there would be nothing really there until the boy conceives of it. So I worked out some general painting styles where the shapes were general but not boring. Also in consideration was the speed and ease in which these backgrounds could be produced. I knew my propensity for rapid cuts and multiple angles. I had anticipated around 50 or so shots within the junkyard (final shot count was almost 60 for the junkyard and in excess of 130 for the film as a whole). A couple of test paintings later and the general look for the junkyard was born.

This time spent on technical merits managed to place more space between me and the events that led to the original proposal. This meant there was less of an emotional attachment to the themes and symbols of the proposed draft leaving me open to new possibilities. Ideas for other
adventures soon followed. Tales of espionage, bar fights and space battles entered into the mix. The segment for a space battle did not make it far beyond the planning stages. In order to achieve the proper look and feel, the scene would require 3D or CGI assist. I did not have the time or know how to do this myself or the money to hire someone else. It was probably for the better. As I would later find out, there was a difficult balance to strike with making each scene unique while having all scenes be part of the same film.

Some of the ideas for diversions started smaller and ended that way. Others grew into long, full length stories of their own. One of the short stories to remain was the sword fight from the original proposal. Though it no longer involved sociological overtones. But a straight forward sword fight would not do either. I decided to use this scene to show how things were going back and forth between reality and the boy's imagination. This juxtaposition would show the audience just how innovative he was. So I intercut quick shots of the sword action with long shots of what was going on in reality. To enhance this interplay, the boy gets beat in the sword fight because his play sword in the real world breaks.

As the boy flees from his enemy, he ends up sliding down a large trash heap. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to change the scene. So now he's sliding down a ski slope. This allowed the scene to stay very active, with things changing up all the time. It keeps the audience on their toes. It also lets the boy go to multiple places without the film getting too long or the work time intensive because these outings are so short. Also I didn't allow the style to change too much between the junkyard and these new settings, so preproduction work wasn't too bad.
That all important car chase scene was also dropped before it went to animation. I clung to that idea for a long time because I loved how the boy got in to and out of the scene. Getting into this scene he seemed so slick and cool (or so he thought). He flipped up his collar, put on sunglasses (at night), revved he engine and then floored it. The style of the city would be very flashy and almost abstract with lots of bright colors and streaking lights. The out was especially fantastic. The car drives off an overpass. We hear a crash. Then there's a close up of the boy wearing an expression of fear and nervousness. The camera turns 90° to reveal the boy is actually vertical because the car has fallen from its perch on the scrap heap. A nice contrast to the smug, pompous look on his face when he entered his cool new ride. But there was never anything interesting for the bulk of the middle. How can this scene stay cool and fun throughout? How can I pay homage to a genre while trying something new with it?

Then I realized I couldn't make this scene any good because I never watched car chases or anything close to that. I hated NASCAR and paid no attention to the Fast and the Furious movies. I'd even yawn at car chase scenes within movies that I liked. So clearly I needed to stick with elements I knew and loved. That was the best way to guarantee segments that were entertaining and innovative. This led to the three major diversions that made the cut: Spy/Espionage, Cartoon Western and Artsy Music.

The opening spy segment seems to pull from the James Bond franchise. It's got action. It's got gunfights. It's got explosions. But it was also the style of the action that was important to me. In that vein, I was influenced more by Ghost in the Shell TV series. The plot line for that series was mostly set up like a standard cop show, but the action was always done in an exciting and
energetic way.

So to set the mood, the scene opens with some long shots of the city. Then a figure appears in the shadows. Some information (who is he, what is he doing, what does he even look like) is left out to give the audience a sense of anticipation. The cutting at the beginning is slow and deliberate to the viewer can take in the setting. This was important so the action in the second half made sense, since it would be so rapid. I also wanted a contrast to the quick action at the end. Once the second half hits, everything is moving. Flashing bullets and truck shots keep the action up. The camera is very active and even changes the speed of the “film” a couple times. All of these shot types are found in the great action movies.

Each shot has many layers of backgrounds and animation to give the sense of a complex space. That complexity required a lot more than I had originally planned. This segment in its first incarnation was rather lacking. In the planning stage, I had underestimated how much detail and finesse was needed. The opening shot had to be entirely reworked in post. I took what was originally one layer of buildings and split and duplicated until there were several layers to give a sense of depth to the shot. Only then did I have a shot worthy of opening a thesis film.

Most of the camera shots were done in post using After Effects. This gave me the ability to change the pace of things after everything was drawn without going back and redoing animation. One shot in particular turned out kind of boring: a truck shot of the boy running across a gangway. So I put all the separate layers at different speeds based on their distance from the “camera” and had the shot pan up as it followed the boy.
These backgrounds are the other aspect of the style I focused on. In cyberpunk works the backgrounds are usually very detailed and textured. There was obviously not six months and a team of artists dedicated to the task of creating thirty complex, realistic backgrounds. I did what I could with the time that I had. But even with some extra line work, the backgrounds were still simple looking. So to make up for this simplicity, I gave the backgrounds rich textures. But they weren't painted on. First I painted some general water color texture swatches. The swatches ranged from paint drips, to splatters, smears etc. With everything in the computer, I could composite the texture onto the backgrounds. Now the walls were stained and the wood crates had knots running through them. This allowed for the illusion of painted textures without so much time spent (see appendix for more details). Also because the same set of textures were used on all the backgrounds, it helped give the section a cohesive look and feel.

And what about that look? Can there be a distinct look and feel to all the various sections and still have a everything work together as a whole movie? This is where the limits of technology worked out favorably. All the animation for the film was done in Flash using a drawing tablet. Flash as a program has great functionality with its timeline, but it is very limited with its brush options. As such even if different sections had dynamic holds (the junkyard) or static holds (western, spy), the line quality was always very similar. Also in all the sections, the line work is vector based while the backgrounds are bitmap images. So no matter how much the cinematography or music changed between sections, there was always a visual element holding everything together.
This almost wasn't the case. Originally the western section was to be drawn on paper. I hand painted the backgrounds and even finished about 25% of the animation. But when it came time to put things together, nothing worked. Artistically and technically, the piece was terrible. The scanners in the lab did horrible things to my drawings. Scans lines were everywhere which in turn caused the alpha channels to be a mess. The colors which looked so wonderful on paper turned dirty and dull. Also since the drawings were done in layers, but everything scanned in so awfully, nothing was lining up. The amount of time needed to fix these problems and clean everything up digitally was greater than the time it took to animate the shots in the first place. Artistically the drawn on paper look stood out too much from the rest of the film. The intent was for really rich textures and color. The actual result was badly strewn together shots clearly drawn on wrinkled paper with no vibrancy or real motion and that seemed stylistically to belong to another film.

A major change had to be made and fast. The decision to go digital at that time was mostly based on technical issues. Going digital meant bypassing the problems with the scanner and color changes. But ostensibly it was for artistic reasons. This section stood out like a sore thumb. But what look should be used here? There was no feasible way to get textures on the characters the same as with the junkyard sections. At least not without putting dynamic holds on instead of static holds. And that would add more work at a time where there had been enough setbacks. This particular segment also needed static holds for all the long dramatic pauses that were planned. Those do not work well with dynamic holds since the line is moving in the frame.

Around this time I had started to watch through the Pink Panther animated series box set.
Inspiration hit. I was struck by the minimalist style of the cartoons. If they needed a door, that meant just the door. No need for a wall or in many cases even a door jam. The story points all still came across. Now while I didn't want my work to look like Pink Panther, it did remind me that minimalist settings could work even with no dialog and comedic scenes. It was ok not to specify everything. Instead of having a busy frame with texture and line everywhere, I would pare everything down to bare essentials. The only lines would be outlines for the shapes. The backgrounds would be kept simple. And if there were background characters, some could consist of only a few lines and a splash of color.

So I got to work redoing the segment. I used the parts that had been previously scanned in for my composition and pulled the colors from them to draw with. It worked. When put together, the shots now formed a cohesive whole. And the individual shots looked better too. The action was much smoother. The colors which had seemed empty now filled the frame and were vibrant, even though they were relatively muted. It also helped that this method saved time with no scanning or computer processing required. I was able to make up most of the time lost on the first attempt. Most importantly, this section now blended well with the junkyard segments before and after it.

This section still has unique aspects to it though. There are exaggerations to all parts of this film (slowed down cameras, longer pauses, over reactions). That is simply in the nature of animation. But the western section is the only section where the characters do not necessarily retain their shape. The reason it works only in this section is the difference in technical aspects. The simple backgrounds and lack of texture or shading allowed for more flexibility with the characters. The reason to do it was the pacing of the action. The first part had plenty of funny pauses and stare
downs, but there was little in the way of action until the last third. This had the potential to make for a boring or slow segment of film. Squash and stretch to speed up otherwise normal action was one way to add punch to the beginning. This also made this section a bit more cartoony, so it was less a spaghetti western and more like a Looney Tunes short. There was also originally a longer bar fight scene planned, complete with bad jump cuts, slow staging and terrible sound effects. With the style moving towards a cartoon short and further away from say, the western “Shane”, a longer scene now seemed unnecessary. There was also the matter of time lost due to technical difficulties so the scene was dropped.

Most the other story segment for the western stayed pretty much the same throughout production. A mysterious stranger enters a saloon, falls for the pretty bar wench and starts a bar fight to protect her. Chairs fly, bottles are thrown and of course someone ends up tossed across a table. But the ending was a different matter. Originally, the script called for the boy to reunite with his damsel behind the bar. Their gazes would cross and they'd lean in for the kiss. This is where I had written myself into a corner. As one may notice, most of this boy's adventures end in catastrophe. But this was a happy ending in the making. So they couldn't kiss. I tried to think of ways to scare him out of the tunnel. Maybe he's slip and fall in water. Or as he leans in, reality strikes in the form of a rat or some other creature. But all of these felt overdone and cliché. There just seemed to be no way out of this except through a kiss (which I really didn't want). Then I realized the length of this section was double some of the others, so the chance encounter was dropped all together.

With there no longer being a romantic moment after the fight, the pacing of the film was now off
kilter. While I like my films to be snappy and exciting, I also like them to have pauses and a chance to breathe. So, after the bar fight, the boy would need to take a breath as well. And what better way to do so than with a rest at the beach? I loved the idea of him drifting off to just the sounds of the ocean. No need to show the area, when we can feel it with him just through the sounds. And as usual I wanted his stay in this fantasy to end just as abruptly as the rest. I certainly can't think of the last time I made it through a thought without being interrupted. Now being at RIT for the previous three years means that I know a lot of guys. And if there is one thing that will always get a guy's attention, its a girl. Just the thought of a girl and they hop to, likely to ignore anything that's going on around them. So of course the boy would knock his head into the overhang just to chance a glimpse at some young girls. It was the only natural course of action.

This would lead into my important sunset shot. Now the previous beach scene takes place in the late afternoon. But the drum circle doesn't start until the evening. I needed to advance the time of day within just a few shots. One suggestion given to me at the time was a time lapse shot. But I hate that style of shot. It seems kinda cheap and lazy when things just skip and fade to get through the action. But I was stuck in a corner with timing in my film. So I created a faux time lapse shot. The boy's animation goes on uninterrupted across the mound. Meanwhile, the sky changes through various hours of the day to set the sun. Now the “time” in the film advances properly without the cheesy fade effects I hate and without adding any extraneous scenes. Now that it is evening, the boy can find his “drum”.

This last of the three major diversions is the most different stylistically. The drum circle section
is very loosely drawn. I wanted there to be very gestural, free drawing. There is also no background to let the audience decide on what the space is. The plan from the start was to shoot footage of people playing instruments, clapping hands, tapping their feet and maybe even dancing and then rotoscope that in a style I had developed earlier that year. Now when the time came to actually shoot footage I was the only actor. But this turned out to be a necessity. The animation had to sync with the music. So I shot footage of myself while I performed the various parts for the soundtrack. This would make syncing the animation to the sound much easier. I just altered the color and the shape of the hands to make it seems as if there were people of different shapes and sizes playing the various instruments. As the rotoscoping was loose anyways, this fit in well.

The lead in to the segment was originally very different. In earlier drafts, the breakdown of the junkyard into the slightly ordered chaos of the drum circle was much more gradual. Much like the sword play earlier in the film, the shots would alternate between reality and imagination for a bit before diving fully into the drumming segment. But as with most parts of the film thus far, the timing of the script was very different from the executed animation. I work on my films sequentially (roughly) from beginning to end. So at this point I had more than seven minutes of animation preceding this section. And I knew from experience that this particular style of rotoscoped animation can grow tired quickly. So the intro was shortened to just three beats and the overall length was dropped to just one stanza of music. The boy had already been in and out of half a dozen adventures. The audience would surely understand what was happening by now.

The meaning behind this section changed drastically, even if what was happening remained
constant throughout production. During the earlier drafts there were still remnants of that awful man-made vs. natural struggle. That theme did not so much disappear as morph into another type of balance. The boy is always getting beat up or kicked out of his previous diversions. This wasn't just out of a sick sense of humor from me, it began as the idea that these adventures were hollow and the boy should find something more meaningful. This musical segment was to be the more meaningful portion. The idea was that this music is a collaborative effort, bringing people together, no matter their background. By the time I got around to animating this section, I had done work on all the rest of the film and enjoyed it. I really had fun working on all the previous diversions. And most of the sentimentality that there should be a message or a moral to the story had been dropped. So it seemed there needed to be a better transition out from this scene. It came with the wind (sounding like a flute a first) interrupting the boy just like the end of every other imagining. It also was a great way to show that it was getting late and that everything was winding down.

With that the film was at its end. But how to exit? With an exit of course. The boy decides to leave the junkyard at the end of his adventurous day. He walks his way out of the junkyard, but he hasn't forgotten his excursions. He acts pieces of them out as he leaves. This shot marks a couple of firsts for the film. It is the first time we see that there could be anything outside the junkyard. It is also the first time we hear the boy's voice. This time when takes his little adventures, we stay outside of his head and witness his real world actions. And because I wanted to end on an exciting and energetic note, the boy takes a jump as he pretends to play the drums again. The camera cuts out while he's still mid-air and jumps right into the end credits complete with “drum-circle” music (with bass added).
The music was one of the hardest parts to creating this film. I didn't want to have a composer come in for two reasons. The first is that I didn't have the budget to hire one. The second is I have very specific tastes and ideas for what my music should be. Most composers who do work on student films seem to just phone in generic stuff pounded out on a keyboard. I do have some experience with music performance so I decided to do the music myself.

For the junkyard settings, I immediately knew what I wanted. Very low key simple music, with light percussion and a kalimba. Unfortunately, the kalimba did not record well, so I switched to a flute. I also found I needed some lower sounds, so I looped a very sparse bass track. The ended up driving the scenes along. It almost became the theme for the junkyard. Whenever you hear it, you know reality has hit. The drum circle section was also very concrete early on. I have many percussion instruments of my own, so I knew what sounds I had to work with. I didn't write this music in the conventional way though. I just sat down in front of the microphone and started playing what I wanted out of each instrument. I then pieced everything together in Audition. For the western section, things were a little more difficult. The content and style kept changing, so I never really did find music I was happy with. All that remains is a short piano loop I made for ambiance. This one aspect I will fix before the film goes out to festivals. For the spy section, I wanted electronic instruments for the music. But I didn't have access to that sort of equipment. So I had a friend, Zach Giles, come in. He came up with two pieces that are perfect, exactly what I was looking for. I didn't have to articulate much at all. I just handed him my footage and he worked magic. I arranged the separate tracks so that the levels matched the action happening on screen.
The sound effects for this film were done after the animation was completed. The spy and western sections have very descriptive sound. Especially the spy section, there is foley everywhere to keep the pace up and add to the atmosphere. A shootout is just not the same without gunfire and ricochets. The western section is a little less dense. But like the music with that section I am unhappy with it. It feels very empty toward the middle of the scene. I need to flesh that out a bit more.

The other sections have very sparse sound. For the beach scene, this was the intent from the beginning. Light waves breaking, a soft breeze every now and then and almost no seagulls to keep the scene from being too overwhelming. The junkyard itself was originally going to have foley for all the steps, slides crashes and bangs. But when I put the music and the animation together, it really felt complete except for a few specific cue hits. Having foley for every little thing would have been boring anyways. How many different ways can a foot hit the same ground?

The final part of sound in most films is dialog. From the start, mine was to have none. There was no real point if the boy was by himself for the entire film. But as the excursions became more elaborate, the temptation was there to add dialog. But that would never have worked. Even if I could put dialog in the one scene where there are other people on screen, I couldn't put it in anywhere else, unless the boy was to talk to himself. And I really wanted the meaning to be told through gesture and action.
The final part to this film was the credits and titles. The title came about as late in the game as possible. I really couldn't find anything that seemed meaningful. So as usual I hit the thesaurus until I found a string of words that had meaning and made sense together. But where to put this title? How you enter a film is very important. I wanted an exciting opening. And I'm a big fan of surprises and reveals. So why not start the film within one of his imaginary adventures? The viewers would be very surprised to see this young boy suddenly pop up at the end of the spy sequence. But I would have to make the pacing much slower after all that action. That's where the title of the film ended up. This way the audience would have a chance to take in what just happened. And just in case they were confused I give them an "explanation shot". Only a few shots after blowing up a building, the boy picks up a piece of scrap metal. For just and instance, it turns into a computer gizmo right before the viewer's eyes.

So the titles shows up two minutes into an eight minute film. The end titles on the other hand came out really fast. The boy jumps up almost into his end credits. It was very important for the ending to be very exciting. The audience should feel like they just had fun.

So now with the film completed it was time to screen. It's not overstatement to say I was very upset when my tape didn't work the first time around. My family and friends were there to support me. And it makes me look unprofessional. Turns out the camera used for capture to tape was faulty. A new setup later and things worked fine. After the film ran, I actually got more comments outside the auditorium than when I was up at the podium. Tom Gassek's remarks about my style made me realize I needed to work on the balance and blending of styles between segments. Hearing from Charles that this is what a graduate thesis should look like was of course
a great confidence booster. But the most interesting remark came from Johnny Robinson. He remarked that it was funny that I (a woman) should be so in tuned with how little boys played and thought.

Now I'm no raging feminist, but this was absurd. As I stated as screenings, I had all the same adventures as a kid (minus the girl ogling). So why can't these adventures be universal. One could ask why didn't I have a little girl in the lead role it this is based on my thoughts of childhood. Well I could go on and on about social or story reasons, but the truth is because I didn't feel like it. My last film stared a girl, so now there was a boy. It's just how I envisioned things.

Plans for this film's future include the usual for any recent graduate. First, it makes the rounds at festivals. Second, it gets chopped up for demo reel. As much as I want to continue making my own films, I do have to pay bills. I hope to get something steady, either at a small studio or perhaps teaching. I made this film with the intent of being able to show it off.

All told I'm pretty happy with the end result. I had a lot of fun making this right until the very end. I'm a little unhappy with the western segment, but it had so many problems along the way. I will try to fix up the sound effects and editing to make it a bit tighter. Other than a few of the usual setbacks and stress, this was really a positive experience. It was really exciting putting the pieces together and seeing the final result. You know you like your film when, as you watch a finished sequence, you cheer.
Appendix A

Thesis Proposal
Thesis Proposal
Stephanie Benvenuto

Working Title:
*A Little Exploration*

Committee:
Skip Battaglia
Johannes Bockwoldt
Kristin Callahan

Approved for submission
Story

A look at the world through the eyes of a young boy.

Synopsis:

A young boy wanders across the landscape. He clutches a bag hung over his shoulder and looks at the ground. He kicks the dirt, pokes around and finally stumbles across something. It is a line sticking out of the ground. He pulls it out along the ground and follows it. It reaches its end and nothing is there. But he looks up to see a huge mass of garbage heaps ahead of him. He acts cautious at first, but decides to dig in. He finds a gun, which he immediately tosses away, disinterested. He continues to find many things lying about in the piles of junk. He picks things up, examines them and either tosses them away or plays with them as he sees fit. He uses a designer purse as a makeshift helmet. He takes a cross and has a duel against an invisible opponent. He takes a nap on a flag and plays checkers with pocket change. This cycle of search and discovery continues for sometime. But nothing holds his interest for very long. He crouches to the ground with a pout on his face.

He looks at something in the distance and runs towards it. It is an orange rind. There are others further ahead. They lead to a small pile of stuff, much smaller than the surrounding garbage heaps. But this pile looks different. The shapes are rounder and the colors warmer. The boy inspects it closely. On top he finds a scarf that he promptly wraps around his neck. He pulls out a book. He smiles and quickly pockets the treasure. The boy finds a potato off to the side. He places it carefully in his bag. He spots something sticking out of the pile. It is a piece of wood.
He struggles to pull it out and knocks half of the pile over in the process. It is a long stick. He looks it over. Then he notices something in the newly turned over pile. He digs for a second and pulls out a wooden bowl. After inspecting it for a while, he tries tapping it. It makes an interesting sound. So he begins to play on it some more. There are sounds of the drum heard throughout the junkyard. The boy looks to his shadow and sees it is very long now. He packs up his instrument, picks up his walking stick and walks off, chin held high.

Approach:

This will be a 2D hand-drawn animation. Drawing and painting (with gouache) will be done on paper and scanned into the computer. The style will be very loose and dynamic. Only relevant objects and ground will be drawn when needed. There is no dialog. Everything will be shown in gesture.

The point of the story is to mock the absurdities of today’s politics and social values. But I want to do it in a way that is subversive and clever. The objects he finds are all fairly common place. We are meant to watch as he explores and interprets these things though new eyes. The above ideas are preliminary. I will spend the summer watching the news, people and anything else around for ideas. The process will take this much time because I want to avoid obvious stereotypes and things done a hundred times before.
## Thesis Budget

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| | total | $668.00 |
Thesis Timeline

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Oct 1: Have completed animatic & nearly finished sound

Production

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April 1: All animation complete

Post-Production

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Screen Mid-May
Proposal for an MFA Thesis Project

A Little Exploration
by
Stephanie Benvenuto

MFA Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
May, 2005

Committee:

Skip Battaglia
Johannes Bockwoldt

Approved for submission

Skip Battaglia – Committee Chair
Discussion Notes:

Why is the boy searching? — what is his goal?
If everything he picks up adds up to making music, there will be a synthesis of all pieces leading to music.
Does the magic come from his intention, or from the material?
Still so simple it is now primarily symbolic information for us. The his action must affect the universe.
The environment is a part of the graphic/auditory presentation.

Approved ________ Date for Resubmission ________________
Not Approved ________ Project to be Completed By ________________

Conditions of Approval:

Committee Chair (or Dept. Chair) Signature ______________________________ Date ________________

I accept that the above is an accurate record of the conditions of approval of my Senior Thesis project.

Student’s Signature ______________________________ Date ________________
Is he only just a boy running around? Why is he unusual? He must be extraordinary.

(maybe, down in the garbage is where the magic will emerge. The child is every child).
Appendix B

Storyboards
Appendix C

Color Stills