TERATORN

An Animated Short by Evan Brock and Mona Dai
Young Cuts Film Festival Competition

Essay Component

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Introduction

The Young Cuts Film Festival is an annual event showcasing the work of undiscovered young film-makers. It is open to all persons under 25 and accepts short films on all subject matter.

We entered the competition with the intent of learning teaching ourselves the basics of the process of creating an animated short. The medium of animation was chosen because of our intent to create a fantastical story that was freed from constraints of physics and the everyday world.

Walt Disney said, "Animation can explain whatever the mind of man can conceive," while also remarking that "I definitely feel that we cannot do the fantastic things based on the real, unless we first know the real."[1]

The story of Teratorn is fantastical, but process of creating it, as summarized in this essay is grounded in traditional and rational procedures. Design decisions were referenced from existing cultural precendents. In order to ensure that the story was delivered with a decent quality of craft, the production process used is based on established techniques in the animation industry.

Outline of Process:

Design:
- story concept
- storyboarding
- character design
- background design

Production (frame-by-frame animation)
- rough animation and keyframes
- inbetweening
- painting and keyframing
- compositing

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[1] Thomas, Frank, and Ollie Johnston. Disney animation: the Illusion of life. New York: Abbeville Press, 1981. Print. 71.
Williams, Richard. The animator's survival kit. London: Faber, 2001. Print. pp.13

Design
Stage 1: Story and Storyboarding

On a grey day in a grey suburb, a small boy walks down the sidewalk. A small bird crosses his path and seems to tease him. The boy is annoyed at the bird's free and happy movements, and proceeds to jump and scare it away. However, he does not anticipate that a monstrous bird would emerge from behind the houses on the street and snatch him away. As the teratorn snatches the boy away, the neighbourhood simultaneously shifts and melts away to reveal a barren landscape with a single tree in the distance. The Teratorn carries the boy to a nest with a smaller bird inside, and the fate of the boy is left for the audience to determine.

Although the genre of *Teratorn* is fantastical, the story is developed based on existing themes in mythology and modern culture.

The short specifically references the ancient Greek myth, *The Rape of Ganymede*. In the myth, Zeus, in the form of an eagle, snatches away Ganymede, a shepherd's son, to serve as a cupbearer to the gods. Many scholars have interpreted the myth as symbolizing the aspirations of humankind for transcendence[2].

The myth has been illustrated many times by artists in history, for example Rembrandt, in his painting *The Rape of Ganymede* below, depicting Ganymede as a plump baby (as opposed to an adolescent as typically shown).

The story of *Teratorn* was conceived as a contemporary interpretation of the myth. The plebian country side home of Ganymede is now shown as an unexciting modern suburb, and Ganymede himself is now depicted as a bored boy walking through it.

Figure 1: *Rape of Ganymede*, Rembrandt

"Rape of Ganymede by REMBRANDT Harmenszoon van Rijn." Web Gallery of Art, image collection, virtual museum, searchable database of European fine arts (1000-1900). N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/rembrand/16mythol/07mythol.html>.

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[2]Humphries, Rolfe, and Corp libro. Metamorphoses. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Print. pp. 230-237

Stage 2: Background Design

Much of the design for the suburban backgrounds came from the films of Tim Burton, in particular, *Edward Scissorhands.*

The set of the film juxtaposes a community of outwardly uniform and perfect suburban houses with the dark castle of Edward, located just outside of it (Figures 3,4). Edward's castle seems to be entirely "other" from the suburban town. This condition serves as an allegory to the psychological conditions of the suburban residents- people who banish anything that deviates from the social norm from their lives.[3]

A similar allegory is used in *Teratorn*. However, the approach in Teratorn is to use a more painterly technique and show the stranger and uncontrolled psychological aspects of the suburban world as existing simultaneously in the negative space between the houses, as depicted the moody sky and atmosphere.

In the first scene, houses were drawn in elevation view with desaturated colours for a flat, uniform and bland look. The look of the houses themselves were referenced from contemporary residential homes in the suburbs of Markham.

The design of the backgrounds was also much inspired by the romantic landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, for example, *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (shown below). There is juxtaposition of death and ruin on the ground plane, with hope of renewal in the sky emphasized by vertical rhythm of the ruined cathedral, and the gnarled trees reaching up.

Figure 2: *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, Caspar David Friedrich

"Rape of Ganymede by REMBRANDT Harmenszoon van Rijn." Web Gallery of Art, image collection, virtual museum, searchable database of European fine arts (1000-1900). N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/rembrand/16mythol/07mythol.html>.

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[3]"How is the 1950s re-imagined through the lens of Tim Burton's films? | Tim Burton and 1950s America." Tim Burton and 1950s America | 1950s Film, Perfection and Propaganda. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Sept. 2013. <http://sarahjay.wordpress.com/2008/05/20/how-is-the-1950s-re-imagined-through-the-lens-of-tim-burtons-films/>.

Figure 3: Pastel coloured houses from *Edward Scissorhands*

Figure 4: The ominous castle from *Edward Scissorhands*

Figure 5: Opening scene of *Teratorn*

Figure 6: The street in perspective view

Figure 7: Suburban houses in elevation view

Figure 8: Ruins of the houses and the Teratorn's tree

One of the final scenes of Teratorn (Figure 8) borrows from Friedrich's imagery of ruins, the lone craggly tree and moody atmosphere. However, instead of the remains of a cathedral, the ruins suggest fragments of suburban houses. Thus, *Teratorn* represents the destruction of the boy's familiar suburban life while simultaneously suggesting hope for renewal in the wild and primitive elements.

Techniques in Background Design:

Foreground and background elements in the background were placed on different layers so that they can be manipulated separately, and so that different effects can be added for a greater illusion of depth and liveliness.

This is a based on techniques of layering used in traditional cel-animation dating back to around 1915 and the animated series *Bobby Bump* by Bray productions. The first significant animated feature to use separation of foreground, background and middle ground elements on different planes was Disney's Snow White[4]. The layers were physically separated into different planes and were filmed by a multi-plane camera to enhance the sense of perspective.

Figure 9: Use of the multiplane camera in Snow White to achieve a layered feel.

"Use Of Multiplane Camera In Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Post #6) | histofanimation." histofanimation | Just another WordPress.com site. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://histofanimation.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/use-of-multiplane-camera-in-snow-white-and-the-seven-dwarfs/>.

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Stage 2: Character Design

The design of the characters draws on the tradition of caricature and exaggeration in animation.

The bird was designed to resemble a prehistoric pterodactyl-like creature. Its head also mimics that of a vulture. As well, the head and eyes borrow roughly from the skulls of Jack Skellington in Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (Figure 11).

After the overall appearances of the characters were decided upon, "model sheets" were produced outlining the standard proportions so that they can be drawn consistently from scene to scene (Figure 10).

This is following a standard process used by animators in practice. For productions much more complex than this one, model sheets specify exact colours, proportions and shapes of each character. Characters are drawn in front, side, back and 3/4 views as well as any typical poses, as needed. [5]
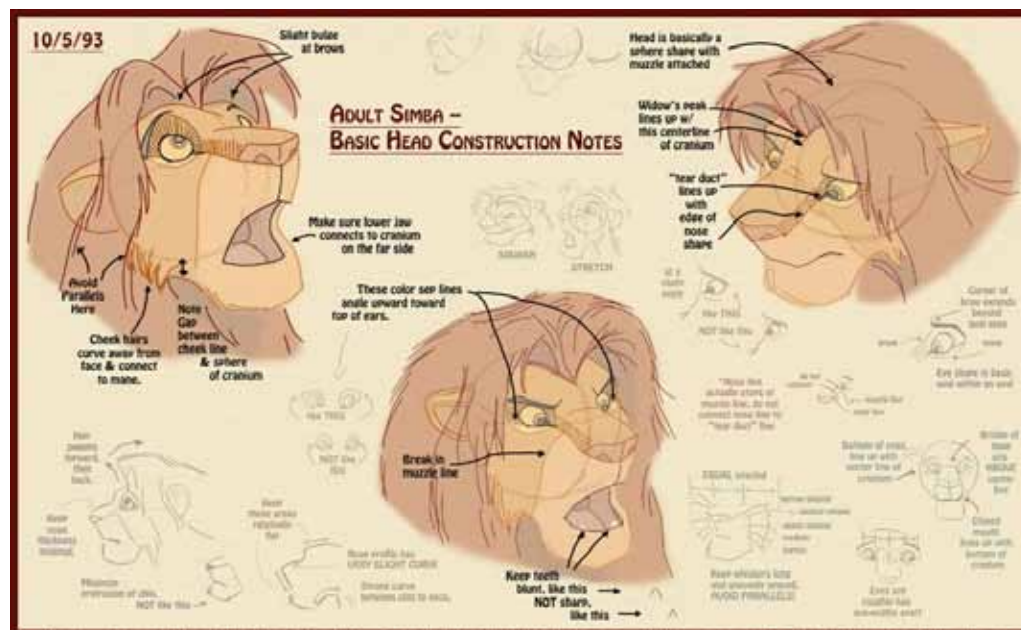

Figure 10: Model sheet for Simba from Lion King.
"Enhanced Model Sheet Photo by koraden | Photobucket." Photo and image hosting, free photo galleries, photo editing. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://s652.photobucket.com/user/koraden/media/Model%20Sheets/AdultSimbaHeadConstruction.jpg.html>.

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[5]"LARRY'S TOON INSTITUTE -- Character Model Sheets." AWN | Animation World Network. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Sept. 2013. <http://www.awn.com/tooninstitute/lessonplan/model.htm>.

Figure 11: Jack Skellington

"Jack Skellington - Disney Wiki." Disney Wiki. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Jack_Skellington>.

Production

"Remember this: You really can't animate a person dancing a boogie, a charleston, a frug, a twist, a ballet, unless you can do 'em yourself, or at least analyse clearly the basis for each step."
-Ward Kimball

For the production of *Teratorn*, we tried to follow the tried and established frame-by-frame production process used by animators in practice. This meant drawing a large number of images in a sequence and thereby creating an illusion of motion. Although this was an extremely tedious process, by drawing each individual frame we were able to analyse every component of a movement, for a more detailed look at the mechanics of real motion. The steps and logistics used in the production of these frames are outlined below.

1. Animatic

After the story and characters of Teratorn were developed and documented, the first step was to create an animated storyboard, sometimes referred to as an "animatic". Crucial frames are drawn in linework at the appropriate times. The animatic stablishes the overall timing of each scene and the rhythm for the entire production.

We used a frame rate of 24 frames per second, because that is the conventional rate used by animators.[6]

An animatic was submitted with this essay.

2. Keyframes

Once the animatic was complete, the next step was to create keyframes for each scene, still in linework. Keyframes show the beginning and end of each path of movement and any key moments. Thus, they inform the basic speed of movement for each character.[7,7]

For example, a normal walk cycle lasts 13 frames, the keyframes would occur at frames 1,7 and 13. Frame 1 marks the start of walk, as the back foot lifts off of the ground. At frame 7, the back foot passes the front foot. At frame 13, the original back foot is now in the position of the original front foot.

[6,7] "Base14 Blog Archive Tutorial: Hand-Drawn Animation in Flash." Base14 . Base 14, n.d. Web. 14 Sept. 2013. <http://base14.com/blog/tutorial-hand-drawn-animation-in-flash/>.

Figure 12: The walk progression.

3. In-Betweening

After the keyframes have been drawn for each scene, additional frames must be filled in between them so that the motion appears smooth. For fast motions, we drew in each frame (at every 1/24th of a second) so that there was no abruptness in the action.

For movements that occured at a moderate speed, for example, a standard walk, we drew on every other frame so that each image lasted for two frames, or 1/12th of a second.

As much as possible, we tried to draw the in-betweened images so that the movements follow a natural arc instead of being rigid and orthogonal. [8]

3. Cleanup, Colour and Shadow

The final step in traditional animation process would be cleanup of linework and addition of colour and shadows to the linework.

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[8] Thomas, Frank, and Ollie Johnston. Disney animation: the Illusion of life. New York: Abbeville Press, 1981. Print.
Williams, Richard. The animator's survival kit. London: Faber, 2001. Print. pp 21

Conclusions

In the process of creating Teratorn, references in art history and film were used to aid in the design of the story, backgrounds and characters. The frame-by-frame animation procedure used a labourious one and not extremely efficient; however it allowed us to analyze in detail the mechanics of making an illusion of motion. The medium of animation allowed for the fantasy of Teratorn to be constructed in a systematic fashion.

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