ROUSSEAU, OR ON EDUCATION

A thesis submitted in requirements
For the degree of Master of Art in Art,
Studio Art

By

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ABSTRACT

ROUSSEAU, OR ON EDUCATION

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"Rousseau, or on Education" is a documentary research project that explores the connection of Rousseau's philosophy to antiquity, modernity and the contemporary society. The film is open-ended, which increases its artistic value. It is intended for classroom discussions in higher education institutions, to encourage critical thinking. Revealing misconceptions about Rousseau’s theories, the film shows that his philosophy is relevant and should be reexamined.

History

Is Rousseau a father of democracy or a father of terror? The film critically examines the connection between Rousseau's philosophy and the French revolution. The summary of Social Contract is included to indicate Rousseau's standpoint: "Those who prescribe the laws should obey them." Professor Goldner addresses misinterpretation of Rousseau's social role by historians who see a link between Rousseau and terror. Juxtaposition of the image of guillotine and nature provides a visual clue of misuse of Rousseau's ideas through political manipulations.
Philosophy

Rousseau's critique of rationality and progress is examined in the context of philosophical change that occurred around 1500. Publication of Machiavelli *The Prince* led to a shift in perception of what it means to be a human being. The connection between morality and politics was lost, and reason became closely aligned with scientific thinking. In modernity, nature is seen as a powerful force that needs to be overcome. This transformation in understanding of nature and reason became a major preoccupation of Rousseau's work. The image of an atomic explosion, as a result of technological development, helps to show the relevance of Rousseau’s concerns in today's world.

Art

Public and private aspects of arts are frequently overlooked in the critical analysis of *Discourse on Arts and Sciences*. Rousseau had a passion for drawing and received formal training as an engraver. However, he wrote a critical response about the role of arts. The film uses the examples of Rococo artworks to show the connection between luxury, arts, and decline of morals that concerned Rousseau. Interview with Professor Brown examines the emergence of Romantic art, which emphasizes expression of emotion and search for the sublime that occurred under the influence of Rousseau.

Education

The main idea of Rousseau’s *Emile; or, on Education* is to bring up a self-sufficient human being. The term “self-sufficient” is aligned with “able to think critically, an independent person.” As the world changes, so do the means of achieving this goal. The film uses a theme of technology to highlight the change in people's behavior, perception and ways of life.
"Rousseau, or on Education" is a 60 minute documentary on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most important philosophers of the French Enlightenment. It explores the controversies about Rousseau's theories in the historical context. The film examines the role of education in counterbalancing side effects of societies’ technological obsession and creating self-sufficient human beings. The purpose of the project is to show the relevance of Rousseau's ideas in the contemporary society.

The idea was originated from the California State University course called "History and Philosophy of Art Education in the United States" with Professor Pistolesi, where *Emile; or, on Education* was analyzed in the context of modern/postmodern debate in art education. (Appendix C) While modernist approach tends to diminish the presence of a teacher to allow children develop freely, the post-modern theory emphasizes active instruction. Inspired to do further research, I discovered that French educational system interprets Rousseau's theory from the angle of discipline, such as "You will have your lunch after you do your homework". Would Rousseau agree with any of these interpretations? What is the essence of his book?

The contradictions around *Emile* led me into further research on Rousseau, a transitional figure between antiquity and modernity, and the originator of psychology, progressive education and ecological movement. My film covers five major aspects: history, philosophy, art, education, and biographical research.

- History: the controversy surrounding the role of Rousseau's ideas in the French revolution
- Philosophy: antiquity, modernity and post-modern thought in relationship to
Rousseau's work

- Art: misinterpretation of the Discourse on Arts and Sciences
- Education: counterbalancing side effects of technology and creating self-sufficient human being
- Biography: Rousseau and his time - the controversies about his children and death.

Through the juxtaposition of antiquity and modernity, my film offers a comparative analysis of Rousseau's work in relationship to Machiavelli, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Voltaire. The research is structured around First and Second Discourses, Social Contract, Confessions and Emile. Educational aspect is a primary theme of my film, which includes a dialog between Rousseau and his pupil Emile, a 21st century kid. "Rousseau, or on Education" raises the questions about the role of technology in the development of youth, and the future of education.

How does Rousseau's educational theory apply to the contemporary society? The basic idea of the novel Emile is to raise a free-spirited, open-minded individual: an independent thinker, who is able to survive turbulence of life under any circumstances. (In some way, this individual is a prototype of Rousseau: an orphan and an immigrant, who had to learn practical skills and earn his bread.) At the same time, an individual is a part of society. In the 18th century France, the question becomes: "How to raise a free-spirited individual under the monarchy?" Attempting to provide an answer, Rousseau was forced into exile. Nowadays, the political system in most progressive countries, including US, follows democratic model suggested in Social Contract. In many respects, Rousseau's educational theory is embedded in our schools. For example, scientific lab
assignments have a direct connection to the practical hands-on experiments suggested in Emile. Internships are the examples of "choosing a trade". Severe punishments in schools, common in the old days, have been replaced by a liberal approach.

If Rousseau lived in the 21st century, perhaps he would re-write *Emile* in consideration to the technological development and media. While there is nothing wrong with technology itself, it's not always used the right way. Scientific discoveries tend to be appropriated for both medical and military purposes. In realm of education, the growing concern is the influence of media on the development of youth. Educational content is greatly missing: media tends to be populated with advertisement and cheap entertainment. Moreover, films and video games show an increasing number of military content. The long-term psychological impact of media remains to be researched. The thesis explores the relevance of Rousseau’s ideas, and suggests further research in the area of education.

How to present complex philosophical concepts in a compelling visual form? The research process became closely linked to screenwriting. Drafting the structure of the film required extensive reading, collecting and filtering of the information, selecting quotes, summarizing Rousseau's ideas and transforming them into the visual form. (Animation samples illustrating philosophical concepts can be found in Appendix C.) Screenwriting overlapped with the editing process. Transcribing the interviews, analyzing the content, and selecting the most relevant parts helped to connect and describe ideas.

The groundbreaking screenwriting theory of Professor Edson was adapted to a documentary filmmaking for the first time. It helped to avoid "a talking head
documentary" style in presenting philosophical content. Rousseau and Voltaire conflict, integrated into historical and philosophical analysis, creates an underlying tension and adds a feature film feel. (See Appendix C for additional analysis of two-way structure of the film.)

The filmmaking process can be examined on multiple levels.

- Screenwriting: looking for the ways to present information in an engaging way
- Artistic research: props, costume design, screen tests, casting, etc.
- Directing: collaboration with the other artists
- Producing: project management and financial aspect

(see Appendix C for specific examples)

Speaking from an artistic perspective, developing a story and exploring the filmmaking techniques while conducting research was a unique experience. In some way, it represents a brainstorming technique applied to live action. Reading, writing down the ideas and trying them out through test voice over recordings, editing, and drawing sketches allowed me to keep a fresh perspective throughout the process. Putting a cohesive story from multiple pieces (like making a collage) is a challenging creative process. Although this is not a conventional method of making a feature film, this technique proved to work for the documentary filmmaking.

By combining academic research and filmmaking, I was hoping to elevate a concept of educational films. The project demonstrates how the definition "educational films" can be separated from the "instructional media". Film can be a powerful tool: it combines different art forms, which allows communicating ideas in the most efficient ways. In today's world, the essential educational aspect of films is greatly overlooked.
"Rousseau, or on Education" received positive reviews abroad. During the screening in France, the viewers acknowledged that the film "shows the connection between Rousseau and the contemporary world", and it "needs to be watched more than once". In addition to providing a link between Rousseau and the contemporary society, the film suggested further research in the area of psychological development of youth, re-evaluation of "progressive education", and addresses ecological concerns.

In my future work, I would like to continue the series of research documentaries about historical figures, such as René Descartes, Laura Mulvey, Jean-François Lyotard, Voltaire, Anna Yaroslavna, and others. However, the pursuit of these projects is highly dependent on the funding. I'm also considering pursuing an M.F.A. in screenwriting, which would lead me into the area of feature films. Moreover, I'm interested in the research projects on Ph.D. level, which explore film history and the connection of media and society.
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APPENDIX A

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Nature never deceives us; it is we who deceive ourselves.”

J-J Rousseau

What makes Rousseau’s ideas relevant today?

Romantic movement, dominating the first half of the 19th century, was taken over by the technological revolution. Fascination with technology found its place in Bauhaus, while Art Nouveau gradually faded out. The end of World War II marked the turning point in technological obsession, and the beginning of critical evaluation. Rousseau’s ideas found their revival in the ecological movement.

I discovered Rousseau in the midst of a cultural change, having moved from Ukraine. The world changed rapidly... locked in an LA apartment with little access to nature, I went through a time of emotional and physical isolation. This documentary project was started in a class on the history of art education with Prof. Edie Pistolesi, where I wrote a short film “Emile in the 21st Century.” It challenged me with a question of bringing up kids in a contemporary society. Can Emile be even imagined in the 21st century?

The quest for truth and beauty seems to have lost itself in the postmodern world, where everything is looked upon through a prism of skepticism. The world reminds me of the journey of Alice in Wonderland, where everything is questionable, shaky and uncertain. While healthy skepticism is a necessary aspect of life, it’s only the means, and not the end.

Perhaps this is why education is so critical. As we teach kids to question the world around them, is there anything else that can be instilled in young minds? I often think about the new generation of kids (including my teenage brother). They seem to be drastically different from the generation of my parents and grandparents. While appreciating the difference, I don’t necessarily like all aspects of it. Something seems to be lost or missing.

The main idea of Rousseau’s “Emile, or on Education” is to bring up a self-sufficient human being. I believe this aspect of Rousseau’s educational theory is still present today. The term “self-sufficient” is aligned with “able to think critically, an independent person”. As the world changes, so do the means of achieving this goal.

“One thinks only of preserving one’s child. That is not enough. One ought to teach him to preserve himself as a man, to bear the blows of fate, to brave opulence and poverty, to live, if he has to, in freezing Iceland or on Malta’s burning rocks. [] It is less a question of keeping him from dying than of making him live. To live is not to breathe; it is to act; it is to make use of our organs, our senses, our faculties, of all the parts of ourselves which give us the sentiment of our existence. The man who has lived the most is not he
who counted the most years but he who has most felt life.”

Nowadays, surviving the digital revolution may seem more important than surviving “in freezing Iceland or on Malta’s burning rocks”. Did we survived it or got enslaved by it? The number of kids (and adults) obsessed with video/computer games makes me question the value of technological progress.

There are two sides to every coin. We should look back in history for the lessons learned, and look into the future for applying those lessons. This is the way I perceive the goal of education.
APPENDIX B

"Nature never deceive us: it is we who deceive ourselvēs."

Rousseau: Rod Bradley, Jody Ashworth
Voltaire: Neil Flowers
Emile: Kirill Vasilyev

Written and directed by Anya Zinoveva

Photo by JamesBurch
APPENDIX C

FILMMAKER’S JOURNEY

Movies are the most powerful art form in today's world. In fact, it is the only art form that can keep viewer captivated for an hour and a half. Films combine several different arts: literature, theater, music, photography, painting (editing), graphics and animation. Andrey Tarkovsky regarded filmmaking as "sculpting in time." I would also regard it as "painting in time." Cinema is a mirror that reflects society as a whole.

Birth of the Idea

The idea for the project was born in the class of Professor Pistolesi "History and Philosophy of Art Education in the United States.” As a part of the curriculum, we were required to read Emile; or on Education by J-J Rousseau. At that time, I was searching for a new direction and idea. Having concluded the period of self-exploration, I wanted to start a new project directed toward the society as a whole rather than my personal world. The reading and analysis of Emile opened that window of opportunity.

Having moved from Ukraine to US, I experienced a dramatic change: the old world crashed into the new world. My younger brother, who seemed to adapt faster and easier, is drastically different from the generation of my parents and grandparents. Going back to Rousseau time re-enhanced the feeling of a changing world. Trying to resolve this underlying tension, I wrote a script for a short film Emile in the 21st Century, structured as the dialog between Rousseau and contemporary Emile. The film uses a theme of technology to highlight the change in people's behavior, perception and the ways of life.

There are two sides to every coin. Are we changing for better or for worth? in what ways? How does technological development affect the changes in human behavior? How do we track the changes that occur? These are the questions I asked when starting the project.

Screenwriting

Each film has an underlying bone structure. As natural as they seem, the actors don't talk and act on their own. All the parts follow the rules established by an invisible magician - screenwriter. How does the story come alive?

Perhaps the biggest challenge was putting the storyline together. Having come from a visual art background, I had little to no experience with screenwriting. However, literature has always been my passion. I wrote poetry and short stories as a kid. Later, I wrote and published articles and participated in literary contests. My writing skills developed further during the years in college. My video work started as short, visual-oriented clips and evolved into longer, narrative-driven pieces. In an attempt to bring together my passion for art and literature, I defined the documentary on Rousseau as a milestone in my personal development.
The film consists of four interrelated parts: history, philosophy, art, and education. I interviewed people in the corresponding areas, which allowed me to define the scope of the research. I realized, however, that having the scholars talk is not enough to create an engaging story. It needed a personal touch, visuals, and even drama. Upon completing the interview on history, I started to plan a trip to France. I decided to visit the places where Rousseau lived, to collect visuals and discover local legends.

The trip is a story within a story. To make it short, I didn't speak any French. Marc Loyer, a French historian, helped me to define the locations and to make initial contacts. I was also fortunate to meet Maureen Hascoet, who helped with filming and translations during the travel. Alain Pêtrement, the mayor of Ermenonville, showed invaluable support in organizing the production and obtaining the releases. I filmed important material at the History Museum (Carnavalet), the City of Ermenonville, and the Espace Rousseau in Geneva. The trip helped me to see cultural differences in the perception of Rousseau.

Upon return, I continued to define the structure of the film. With important biographical material, the story was coming alive. However, I saw a need for creating a certain underlying structure that would make it engaging. During my graduate studies at CSUN, I was fortunate to take a class on the theory of screenwriting with Professor Edson, the author of “THE STORY SOLUTION: 23 Actions All Great Heroes Must Take.” Although this groundbreaking theory only applies to feature films, I decided to take it a step further and bring “hero” and “adversary” structure into the documentary.

The adversary (Voltaire) becomes a personalization of Rousseau's conflict with his time. At the midpoint, the viewer and the hero come face to face with Voltaire for the discussion on abandonment of Rousseau's children. Toward the end of the film, the adversary reappears for the final battle. Rousseau learns about Voltaire's death, which is followed by his farewell and juxtaposition of the philosophical ideas in the conclusion. The death of both the hero and the adversary marks a difference in the application of Prof. Edson’s theory.
The theme of the film is a tension between Rousseau and his time. The film starts with the drama (Rousseau's escape from France). Then, it takes on a detective story approach, investigating the events and implications of the conflict. The use of the motifs (burning books and escape) helps to build tension.

Great amount of research was required for putting together a cohesive story. I focused on First and Second Discourses, Emile and Social Contract. I also read Confessions and added some biographical material. To condense the content of Rousseau's philosophical theories in a short visual statement was a major challenge. The content of Social Contract is summarized in one sentence: "Those who prescribe the laws should obey them."

Discourse on Arts and Sciences is represented by the animation sequences:

"While science, taken abstractly, deserves all our admiration, the pursuit of sciences weakens body and soul".
"The pursuit of sciences and arts raises vain ambition and arrogance in men's hearts."

Production: The Making of "Rousseau, or on Education"

Making of a film is a collaborative process. Working closely with the other artists greatly enhanced my social and communication skills. I gained an invaluable experience in working with the actors, photographers, makeup artists, etc. However, 90% of work required for making the film I completed on my own.

Here is the list of my roles in the project:

- screenwriter
- director
- producer
- casting director
- costume designer
- set designer
- set coordinator
- editor
- special FX/motion graphics artist

Production of the film should be looked at three different parts:

- pre-production
- production
- post-production

All parts are equally important for the final result. I will use two examples to explain the process of film production.
Voltaire

The character of Voltaire is played by Neil Flowers. The choice of the actor was determined by visual similarity, his knowledge of 18th century culture, French language skills, and the special interest he showed in the project. During the audition, he was able to capture the spirit of the scene on the first try. During the rehearsal, however, the actor deviated from the original version. He created a negative, angry Voltaire. It took two rehearsals to bring the original character back. First, I was trying to correct the scene by adjusting the speech flow. Then, I took a general approach. I suggested that Neil imagines himself during a TV show, discussing his political opponent Rousseau. "If you show your anger, it will make you look negative to the public. You want to attack your opponent by using different means." This suggestion made a great improvement on the direction of his acting. However, we lost 18th century feel of the character. He became a 21st century Voltaire. I was able to correct the problem during the shoot. I dressed in the spirit of the time, and asked him a question: "Monsieur de Voltaire, have you heard about the recent events in Paris? The books of Monsieur Rousseau were burned, and he secretly fled the country... I haven't read the books... but what to you think about it?!" This question helped the actor to get in the spirit of the time, and he responded in a manner suitable for 18th century salon life.

In addition to directing the acting, I was also working as set designer and costume designer. It took several weeks to find the following items: quill pen, 18th century inkwell (purchased in France), seal, antique books, and candle holders. Paper required specialized research. I consulted Bruce Whiteman, the former head of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, the Rare Book & Manuscript Library of UCLA, who is an expert on 18th century paper. He said: "People didn't write on parchment in the Enlightenment, they wrote on paper, or largely. [...] Of course it was mould-made paper, made from rags, not our tree-based paper, but it was regular old paper to them." He
directed me to Hiromi Paper International, where I was able to find corresponding samples.

A note on the book: Voltaire is responding to the famous Discourse on Arts and Sciences. He opens the book and looks at the title page. Of course, I didn't have a museum copy of the first edition during the shoot. However, I had footage from my French trip. I extracted the original frontispiece and made some adjustment in Photoshop. The title page was recreated in Illustrator. Both parts of the cover were printed on the old-style paper and inserted into an antique book.

I also did a research on 18th century furniture. Having looked at several writing desks at Omega Cinema Props, I chose the red wooden desk with flowery design on top. This desk allowed to highlight the character of Voltaire. Upon selecting the props, the color scheme of the scene was established. Warm colors of the furniture, books, and candles required some contrast. For the costume, I selected a dark blue coat with golden stripes. The use of cold color was intentional, to highlight the nature of antagonist. To add an accent, Voltaire is wearing a red vest underneath the blue coat.

Makeup for Voltaire character was done by Kim Graczyk. However, I helped the artist by collecting Voltaire portraits and selecting the wig. Based on the comparative analysis of the actor’s face, adjustment to his nose was required. Kim did a full cast of the actor's face, sculpted his nose, attached it during the shoot, and airbrushed his face with Dinair makeup. The wig was styled and airbrushed as well, to add a highlight.

Keeping track of the video records of the audition/rehearsals greatly helped with analysis of the progress and suggestions for acting. It also helped with selecting the angles for the shots. I did a test edit of the scene, and showed it to the director of photography. I also made a list of shots, to facilitate the process. We were using two cameras during the production, which helped tremendously during the editing process. Slider was used for camera B, which allowed to do camera movements.

*King and People*

"King and People" scene illustrates Social Contract: "Those who prescribe the laws should obey them." It is referenced twice during the film, as a recurring theme of Rousseau's conflict with authorities. Originally, it was considered as one of the animation sequences. Concerned about the cost and complexity of the production, I was looking for a cost-efficient solution. However, I came to realize that animation wouldn't have the same impact as live action.
First, I had to resolve a question about the character of the king. Should he look like any of the historical kings? If yes, which one? I decided that historical reference will add value and build the connection. Louis XVI seemed to be the most appropriate choice, due to the reference to French revolution.

I did a research on the actors who portrayed Louis XVI. However, I made a choice independent of other directors. The King is played by Ron Barba. Upon reviewing his demo reel, I noted a reserved manner of acting, which would be appropriate for royalty. The shape of Ron’s nose was changed with makeup. The makeup artist also did a minor adjustment to the shape of his lips.

Selecting the props required some research and testing. I reviewed the rugs and chairs, took the pictures of available props, and put together a Photoshop composite. It allowed me to match the color of the rug and the chair to the background image.

Costume design was a major challenge. There are eight actors in the scene. Due to time limitations, I hired a costume designer. Liz Nankin did the measurements of the actors, pre-selected the costumes, and sent me the pictures of the actors wearing the costumes. I made a Photoshop composite with different costume options. The final selection was made based on the overall color scheme and relationship of the costumes to each other. The process closely resembles painting.

Having studied historical portraits, I noted that Louis XVI didn't wear a crown during official occasions. I also realized that heraldic can be very specific, and it would be better to abandoned the use of crown altogether rather than show a fake one. Thus, the King is distinguished from the rest of the people by his costume and posture.
Regarding the scripting of the scene: it was created during the process of rehearsal and filming. Originally, I envisioned the people kneeled down to the king, who is extending his hand over them. During the rehearsal, I asked the actors to kneel down very low. Upon reviewing the footage, I realized that the scene becomes a distorted exaggeration. How to make it natural? Since I didn't have a budget for another rehearsal, I had to use an alternative method.

I did the research on the court scenes and sent the updated instructions to the actors. I was able to meet some of the actors during the costume fitting session and rehearsed them individually. At the day of the shoot, I asked an expert on 18th century culture to rehearse the actors.

The final adjustments to the scripting were made during the production. Tyler Haynes, one of the King’s advisors, said quietly: "Your Majesty, the messengers are here." The messengers entered and kneeled down. The King extended his hand (while sitting on the chair) to greet them. Then, he stood up and took the message. The storyboard of the scene was literally designed on the fly; however, it achieved the desired depth and significance.
Summary

I set up the following goals with the project:

- to create an example of educational film for higher education institutions
- to research 18 century culture and philosophy
- to investigate and break apart certain misconceptions about Rousseau
- to develop my screenwriting skills

The category of educational films is largely undefined. Wikipedia currently has a stub article, which lists the examples of (low-budget) instructional films. I see educational films as much more diverse and inclusive. Educational aspect should be understood in a broader view, since films have the ability to promote critical thinking. In this regard, our entire life can be considered as an educational process.

In 2010, I started Educational Film Production. My goals for the future are to create films for higher education. In this regard, Rousseau or on Education can be seen as the first in a future series of films about philosophers.

Working on the project allowed me to research 18th century culture and history. It also allowed me to explore the connection between antiquity, the Enlightenment, modernity and postmodernism. Moreover, I was able to investigate and break apart certain misconceptions about Rousseau, who is considered a controversial figure in many respects.

The conclusive part of my thesis is a movie trailer. After exploring the screenwriting techniques in a longer format, I went back into a short visual summary. Both of those skills are equally important in my development as a filmmaker.
APPENDIX D

www.rousseaufilm.com
www.rousseaufilm.com/trailer/
The film is available at http://www.educationalfilms.com