

Finding Luxo: Discovering the Pixar Brand through  
Short Form Storytelling

by

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## Introduction: Pixar Philosophy

In one of the iconic scenes from Pixar Animation Studio's 2005 film *The Incredibles*, Helen Parr AKA Mrs. Incredible and her children Violet and Dash are trapped in a cave hiding from the villain's evil henchmen. Helen turns to her children and asks, "Remember the bad guys on those shows you used to watch on Saturday mornings? Well these guys are not like those guys."<sup>1</sup> While Parr is only referring rather disturbingly to the fact that these bad guys will not hesitate to harm children, her warning manages to say a lot more about the film she is and more importantly, the studio that created it. These guys are not like those guys because they are Pixar creations and therefore not your typical cartoons. *The Incredibles* and the rest of the Pixar canon take place in worlds where things matter because things can be lost. Fictional realities with realistic emotional stakes are what Pixar has become known for and this distinguishes their work in the field of contemporary animation.

It is easy to prove Pixar's success with numbers. Their highest grossing film, *Toy Story 3*, made more than a billion dollars at the box office, and out of their thirteen features, only two have not been nominated for a single Oscar.<sup>2</sup> What is harder to quantify is the respected reputation the studio has generated with their films and the changes that has had on the animation medium. Film Critic Wesley Morris might have put it best, when in his obituary for Steve Jobs he wrote with regard to computer animation "This frontier made us nervous. No more hand-drawn animation?"

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<sup>1</sup> *The Incredibles*. Dir. Brad Bird. Perf. Craig T. Nelson, Samuel L. Jackson, Holly Hunter. Pixar Animation Studios, 2004. DVD.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix

But most Pixar films are better than most live action films.”<sup>3</sup> The answers to why this is, lay far deeper than statistics. They lie in the stories these films tell and the way those stories are told. They lie in the studio’s structure and it fosters creativity. Most importantly, they lie in the minds of the artists who work on these films.

While Pixar is best known for its features, there is a subset of Pixar’s films that make the studio no money<sup>4</sup> yet define the studio just as much as the features do: these are the short films. Every Pixar feature except their first, *Toy Story* (1995), has been released theatrically with a short film preceding it. Even before *Toy Story*, the studio produced three short films under the Pixar label and one for Lucasfilms Computer Graphics Division. The films are made by different directors, span different genres, and have different looks. The only things they have in common are their brevity and the Pixar label. What the following chapters hope to do is reveal what that label means using close analysis. It examines the essential skills the Pixar team learned in their early years, how they learned to develop comedy and sentiment separately and fused together, and how they continue to experiment to this day with the medium.

Ed Catmull, Pixar’s president and co-founder, claims “because everyone knows that the shorts have no commercial value, the fact that we continue to make them sends a message that we care about artistry at Pixar; it reinforces and affirms our values.”<sup>5</sup> While Catmull is speaking more to the business strategy, I argue that the content and the structure of these films individually also point Pixar’s definition of

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<sup>3</sup> Morris, Wesley. “For better or worse, he tamed technology.” *boston.com. The Boston Globe*, 7 October. 2011. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Catmull, Ed. *Creativity Inc.* New York: Random House, 2014. Print. Pg. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Catmull, Pg. 210.

artistry. Each film is a clear, concise example of narrative choices that exemplify the Pixar style and the Pixar ethos. What these films achieve on a smaller scale has been incorporated into the features on a larger scale and helped to define Pixar's personality.

The studio has been studied extensively for its creative structure and this analysis includes answering the question of how this structure has influenced the shorts. Since the founders created this studio from the ground up, they were able to stick to ideals that prioritized creativity. As Catmull says, "my hope was to make this [creative] culture so vigorous that it would survive when Pixar's founding members were long gone, enabling the company to continue producing original films, that made money, yes, but also contributed positively to the world."<sup>6</sup> Catmull touches on key elements of the Pixar structure with that statement. First of all, he points to how Pixar is far more than just a single man or even its three founders. As author Karen Paik points out "[chief creative officer John Lasseter] wanted the name 'Pixar' to be identified with the group of filmmakers at the studio and their shared attitude toward their craft."<sup>7</sup> This concept is not just John Lasseter and Ed Catmull being democratic. Walt Disney heavily influenced the artists at Pixar and Catmull points out that "Disney Animation wasn't able to survive without enduring a decade and a half, if not two, of a slump"<sup>8</sup> since Disney neglected to foster young talent. By avoiding Disney's folly, they would be saving Pixar from the same fate. Catmull is also a believer in sacrificing ego for quality. Catmull has "made a policy of trying to hire

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<sup>6</sup> Catmull, Pg. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Paik, Karen. *To Infinity and Beyond!: The Story of Pixar Animation Studio*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. Print. Pg. 113.

<sup>8</sup> Catmull, Pg. 123.

people who are smarter than [he is] [...] they innovate, excel, and generally make your company—and by extension, you—look good.”<sup>9</sup> Catmull’s philosophy creates an open creative culture where the product is valued over an individual’s reputation.

This sense of Pixar’s priorities is the second important point in Catmull’s statement about Pixar’s culture. He alludes to the fact that money is not the primary goal of a Pixar film. He later says, “making the process better, easier, and cheaper is an important aspiration, something we will continually work on—but *it is not the goal*. Making something great is the goal.”<sup>10</sup> It is only through that aspiration for something great that Pixar has been able to sustain its success. They refuse to settle for films they consider less than their best. There is a pride in their product. It is why critics like Wesley Morris respect Pixar so much. They have a tradition of quality. Composer Randy Newman put it best when he said, “They’re clean, you know? They work hard for years and years and it shows. Best of all, they have respect for their audience.”<sup>11</sup> Since their films have a tradition of and a sense of purpose, audiences feel respected and artists want to continue to work for them.

Catmull refers to the desire to continue to make original films long after the founders are gone. At Pixar, there is strong sense of ownership for their films. They do not accept outside pitches and “all of Pixar’s ideas and stories are developed internally.”<sup>12</sup> This cohesion is essential for the development of a Pixar brand. John Lasseter explains:

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<sup>9</sup> Catmull, Pg. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Catmull, Pg. 134.

<sup>11</sup> Paik, pg. 107.

<sup>12</sup>“Company FAQ.” Pixar. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

<<http://www.pixar.com/about/Company-FAQS>>

So often people come together to make a great movie and then just disband afterward. They might get people back together to do a sequel or something, but it's never quite the same. Our desire from the beginning was to build a studio. We wanted our people to be here for the long term, to be trained here and to feel secure about staying.<sup>13</sup>

Through this philosophy, Pixar makes effective use of collaboration and has been able to store up enough institutional knowledge to learn from the mistakes of their past. A core group of creative people has contributed to each Pixar film, and as they have grown, so have the films. When audiences pay to see a Pixar film, they are paying for that group of filmmakers. The way that brand lasts is by those same filmmakers passing on their strategies and philosophies about life and movies down to younger generations.

The way they have formalized this process is through something called “the Braintrust” which is an ever shifting collective of experience Pixar artists who gather and give feedback on each film during the production process.<sup>14</sup> Catmull says “if I could distill a Braintrust meeting down to its most essential ingredients” it would be “frank talk, spirited debate, laughter and love.”<sup>15</sup> With these discussions these films became products of many minds instead of just one. Sound designer and director Gary Rydstrom summarizes it when he says “there is always the singular vision of the director making the film, but the project is open to comments and ideas from people not even on their team. That collaboration across projects is great. It makes you feel

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<sup>13</sup> Paik, Pg. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Catmull, Pgs. 86-87.

<sup>15</sup> Catmull, Pg. 98.

like you're part of the studio, not just doing a film and using the studio to accomplish it."<sup>16</sup> Through these Braintrust meetings, many visions become part of one brand. The process does not suppress the vision of the director, but it gives other artists a forum to help the director make it better. Since each person brings in their strengths and the lessons they have learned from the mistakes of their past, the films truly become a stronger, collaborative effort. These meetings allow Pixar's films to be considered as films made by a studio as opposed to an individual.

Catmull and these other filmmakers have defined Pixar along three lines: utilitarianism, high quality standard, and cohesion. What is missing from these elements is Pixar's personality. First of all, embedded within this culture is a sense of playfulness and positivity that finds its way into every film the group makes. As Catmull says, "At Pixar, we have always had a pretty deep bench of jokesters and a core belief in having fun."<sup>17</sup> This is best seen in Pixar's comedies and the light-hearted spirit present in each film that adds appeal to all ages. Secondly, there is a sense of higher purpose to Pixar films that justifies the effort Randy Newman referred to in his statement. Catmull calls this "an unspoken contract with the viewer that says: We are striving to tell you something impactful and true."<sup>18</sup> The impact comes through in the Pixar animators' manipulation of sentiment and the emotional realism in their films. These films may be mostly fantastical, but they are rooted in the experiences of the artists creating them. Lasseter explains this best when he refers to "movies that sprung from people's hearts and connected in a real way with

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<sup>16</sup> Paik, Pgs. 295-296.

<sup>17</sup> Catmull, Pg. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Catmull, Pg. 198.

audiences.”<sup>19</sup> These are deeply personal films for those involved and the hope is that they will end up being personal for the audience as well. The reason that Pixar is ultimately so successful is because it was founded by men like Catmull, Lasseter, and the late Steve Jobs who believe “because they dig for deeper truths, [their] movies will endure, and [Jobs] found beauty in that idea.”<sup>20</sup> Catmull follows this statement by quoting Lasseter speaking of “the nobility of entertaining people.”<sup>21</sup> To these men, animation means far more than Saturday morning cartoons. It is a medium to communicate real truths and the trio built a studio to enable those truths to reach the world. This analysis works to see how they live up to these ideals in their short films.

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<sup>19</sup> Catmull, Pg. 252.

<sup>20</sup> Catmull, Pg. 308.

<sup>21</sup> Catmull, Pg. 208.

## Portfolio Films: Inventing a Medium

Bill Reeves, Global Technology Supervisor and former technical director at Pixar, refers to the short films made by the studio before *Toy Story* as “portfolio films.”<sup>22</sup> Portfolio films are the type of films a student compiles over time to prove his or her skills as a filmmaker. The studio’s ultimate goal was to master the tools they needed in order to create the first feature length computer animated film and these shorts were the stepping-stones to that goal.<sup>23</sup> This “portfolio” shows a progression in the young group’s filmmaking skills. Since they were at the forefront of a new field of technology, this portfolio also demonstrates a progression of the early advancement of the entire computer animation field. The films *Luxo Jr.* (1986), *Red’s Dream* (1987), and *Tin Toy* (1988) are the clearest examples of the studio’s progress at this time.<sup>24</sup> They show off the studio’s eventual ability to combine storytelling with technology in a way that works on an emotional and aesthetic level. Each film is a different lesson. *Luxo Jr.* has characters with personality and a complete emotional journey. *Red’s Dream* is the first film to make use of an expressive style of filmmaking that makes emotional use of the setting. *Tin Toy* is a fusion of those two elements and possesses a complete, action-based plot. These

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Reeves. Personal Interview. January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Catmull, Pg. xii.

<sup>24</sup> There are two films from this period not discussed in this chapter: *The Adventures of Andre and Wally Bee* (1984) and *Knick Knack* (1989). While both these films did contribute to the studio’s development, *Andre* was made by the Lucasfilm Computer Graphics Division by the same team as Pixar before Pixar was founded. It is rudimentary and lacks the emotional resonance of *Luxo Jr.* so it is more effective in this analysis to begin at *Luxo Jr.* *Knick Knack* showed less forward momentum than the other films and will instead be discussed in a later chapter when discussing Pixar’s use of comedy.

imperfect yet influential films show the development of the group of people who founded Pixar and continue to lead it to this day.

The first film to carry the Pixar label was *Luxo Jr.*, released in 1986. The star of the film, a small bouncing lamp whom the film is named for, has remained the mascot of the studio ever since. The company chose him to represent the company for key reasons beyond the fact that he starred in their first official film. *Luxo Jr.* contains many of the filmmaking strategies that contribute to what Ed Catmull, current President and Cofounder of Pixar, refers to as “John [Lasseter’s] genius [...] in creating an emotional tension, even in this briefest of formats.”<sup>25</sup> In less than two minutes, Lasseter and the other filmmakers take us through surprise, joy, disappointment, and back to joy again using very little beyond character animation. *Luxo Jr.*’s bare-bones work shows off Pixar’s story-telling spine. There is an effort to illicit more than one strong emotional response from the audience whether it is a laugh, tears, or just a simple sigh. While every Pixar film is about something different, most have this type of emotional journey and the exceptions will be discussed in the chapter on comedy. The fact that more than one emotion is elicited is something that sets the Pixar shorts apart from many other animated shorts. *Luxo Jr.* was the studio’s jumping off point and its most effective elements represent the mature understanding of the film medium the artists at Pixar had from the very beginning. The character of Luxo Jr. is a reminder of that understanding and that fact along with the film’s historical context justifies why this small lamp came to define the Pixar brand.

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<sup>25</sup> Catmull, pg. 36.

*Luxo Jr.* is a clear example of one of John Lasseter's mantras: "Art challenges technology and technology inspires the art."<sup>26</sup> *Luxo Jr.*'s technology is primitive enough to put limitations on the story. Catmull came to Lasseter after Steve Jobs bought the company to suggest that they make a short film that would define Pixar as a studio.<sup>27</sup> At the time of the request, Lasseter was learning from the engineers how to use the computer to replicate everyday objects, a technique called "modeling," and he was using the lamp on his table as a test subject.<sup>28</sup> By playing with that lamp, he was able to conceptualize a live character out of an inanimate object. The technology practice was, however, only the impulse for the story. After the initial set up, it was the story requirements that demanded new leaps forward from the technology and not the other way around.

At the time *Luxo Jr.* was released, the engineers at Pixar were not only creating stories, they were inventing the tools they were using to tell those stories. *Luxo Jr.* therefore debuted at a technology convention called SIGGRAPH in order to demonstrate the engineers' advancements.<sup>29</sup> By debuting at a convention that focused on technology instead of art, the filmmakers inadvertently proved a point that has guided the company ever since: At Pixar, "Story is king."<sup>30</sup> In a room full of people gathered to witness the latest in computer graphics, *Luxo Jr.* stood out because it

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<sup>26</sup> Lasseter, John. *The Pixar Shorts: A Short History*. Dir. Tony Kaplan, Erica Milsom. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>27</sup> Catmull, Ed. *Short History*.

<sup>28</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Luxo Jr.* Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1986. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>29</sup> Lasseter, John. *Short History*.

<sup>30</sup> Catmull, pg. 66.

engaged the audience on an emotional level.<sup>31</sup> At surface level it was there to demonstrate things like Bill Reeves' self-shadowing programming and Lasseter's modeling, but what Pixar demonstrated as well, was Lasseter's mantra about combining technology and story.<sup>32</sup> The SIGGRAPH crowd was used to short clips made by engineers without any training in filmmaking.<sup>33</sup> Pixar kept these engineers on their team, but put them in a room with Lasseter, a trained artist.<sup>34</sup> This led to an exchange of ideas from both parties that led in turn to the ability to create a well-received film using entirely novel tools. *Luxo Jr.*'s juxtaposition with the other works at SIGGRAPH and its ultimate success proved that the missing link for computer animation was having a classically trained animator employed. He was able to take the film beyond a demonstration and instead worked to have it tell a story. In short, it made computer animation a filmmaking medium.

The story for *Luxo Jr.* is very simple. A big lamp, Luxo, watches a little lamp, Junior, play with a ball and eventually deflate it by accident. After this initial disappointment, the little lamp comes back with an even bigger ball and commences playing again. With such a basic and frankly uninteresting plot, the power of *Luxo Jr.* lies in the details, specifically the body language of the lamps, the establishment of the parent/child relationship, and the strategic choices regarding sound.

The film begins by piquing the audience's curiosity with the static image of a realistically rendered desk lamp. Computer generated imagery was such a new field

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<sup>31</sup> Guggenheim, Ralph. *Short History*.

<sup>32</sup> Lasseter, John and Bill Reeves. *Short History*.

<sup>33</sup> Carpenter, Loren. *Short History*.

<sup>34</sup> Lasseter, John. *Short History*.

in 1986, that this in and of itself was impressive.<sup>35</sup> It also foreshadows animation's potential to create an image that is so life-like that it tricks you into believing it is live-action however briefly.<sup>36</sup> Luxo Sr. remains completely still until a ball rolls in from off-screen and that is the impetus for the lamp to come to life. Life is now manifesting itself in this ball. The ball's journey points to the fact that no matter what happens onscreen, there is a world off-screen that is animate. It also associates life with the figure pushing this ball to Luxo. Since that will turn out to be Junior he will always be associated with vitality. After the ball rolls in, Luxo shines his light on the ball and moves his "head" around it, showing off the fact that he is as unfamiliar with this ball as the audience is with this style of animation. This is a magical moment because this is the moment Pixar's first character comes to life. Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnson cite "a special ingredient in [...] animation that produces drawings that appear to think and make decisions and act of their own volition; it is what creates the illusion of life."<sup>37</sup> Lasseter has managed to capture that ingredient in these moments. Luxo's movement produces a consistency in tone, where the audience, the protagonists, and the creators all feel the same emotion. We are all careful explorers in an unknown universe responding to a new thing with wonder and curiosity.

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<sup>35</sup> Ostby, Eben. *Short History*.

<sup>36</sup> This potential and its possible dangers and benefits will be fully explored more than twenty years later in Pixar's *The Blue Umbrella* (2013). At this point, Pixar does not yet have the technology to do more than make the lamps look real so the photorealist effect is lost due to the lack of detailed backgrounds and visual effects.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, Frank and Ollie Johnson. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. New York: Walt Disney Productions, 1981. Print. Pg. 9.

Lasseter raises the suspense of the situation by having Luxo start a game of ball with the mysterious off-screen force, which adds gentleness to the tone of the film. This off-screen presence is not menacing if all it wants to do is play ball and neither is Luxo if he wants to play too. Since this ball is a toy, it also foreshadows the fact that the off-screen presence is a child and begins to establish the relationship between Luxo and the soon to be introduced Junior. This exchange also gives the studio a chance to show off some of its new technology. The engineers were able to program an exact path for the ball and have the ball rotate naturally along this line.<sup>38</sup> The programming mimics proper physics and therefore the studio eliminates a possible point of distance between the film and the audience by not settling for rudimentary animation. Every time the ball rolls passed Luxo is an advance in the technology of the time yet it does not draw attention to itself as such. The story needed a ball so they worked to create one whose movement would not reveal the creative force behind the movie. The ball also has a purpose in regards to the plot because when the ball rolls off-screen and then back, it is a turning point in the story. It introduces the possibility of a new character and will switch the film over from being an introduction to Luxo as a character to a story about the relationship between Luxo and this other character. This is punctuated by an overt and large movement by Luxo as he reacts in surprise to what he sees. It is his largest movement so far and it corresponds to the excitement of the moment.

At this point Luxo Jr. hops on screen and changes the pace of the film. Before Junior shows up, everything moves slowly and has time to breathe. It is a very calm

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<sup>38</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Luxo Jr.*

film before this moment. Junior, just like a real child, has no patience for this. While his dad moves methodically, Junior moves with lots of energy and buoyancy. Ed Catmull describes the power of this type of movement in his book *Creativity Inc.* Much like Thomas and Johnson, he claims that:

The definition of superb animation is that each character on the screen makes you believe it is a thinking being. Whether it's a T-Rex or a slinky dog or a desk lamp, if viewers sense not just movement but intention—or, put another way, emotion—then the animator has done his or her job. It's not just lines on paper anymore; it's a living, feeling entity.<sup>39</sup>

Lasseter has already established the big lamp's curiosity and intention, but this little lamp is strongest example of an inanimate character's emotions brought to life. He exudes joy and energy that make him alive rather than just a desk lamp. Most distinctively, Junior has a wiggle, a quick back and forth shake of the bend in his body that compliments all his activity. It is a silly element, but it is one of the strongest story elements of this dialogue free narrative. It is also recognized as such seeing as the move is honored in the Pixar logo every time Junior hops out at the beginning of each film. It makes Junior a character beyond the basic parameters of the plot and identifies him as young in spirit as well as size. It is cute and a bit ridiculous, along with being a cocky gesture, exhibiting the lamp's overconfidence. He is putting on a show both for us and for Luxo. He does however face Luxo when he wiggles, showing that his focus is on impressing or at least engaging with his

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<sup>39</sup> Catmull, Pg. 8.

assumed father. His “head” does not leave his father and the gesture is simply a gesture of joy with no utility for the forward movement of the plot beyond expression. He is happy to playing with his father and in that moment, happiness is all that matters. It is evidence of a closer relationship between the two lamps, which is at the heart of the film.

At this point in the film, the sound is brought more to the forefront. The trill attached to Junior’s shake gives the wiggle greater emphasis and adds to the silly tone of the movement. While this is the most overt sound effect so far, sound is used from the beginning to tell the story at a different level than the visuals. There are two main components, the music and the noises the lamps make. The music itself is not very distinct, but that is part of its power. Disney composer Oliver Wallace says that the score “should be like a beautiful carpet that complements the loveliness of the furniture and paintings in a room. If it is so glaring and obvious that you notice the carpet and don’t notice the other features of the room, than the illusion of beauty is utterly destroyed.”<sup>40</sup> *Luxo Jr.*’s score is essentially elevator music and with that sort of background nature, it allows the images of the lamps to come to the forefront. It is not distracting. Its precise timing does, however, serve the story. The music begins as the ball rolls in the first time and brings the lamp to life. It changes again when the little lamp comes in and gets faster and more energetic just like the little lamp itself. In short, the music helps tell the audience what they should feel. At the beginning its patient anticipation and the second act is all joyful appreciation. It compliments the action and helps the story come across at all sensory levels.

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas, Bob. *The Art of Animation*. New York: Golden Press, Inc., 1958. Print. Pg. 88.

The sound effects in *Luxo Jr.* are subtle just like the score with the same aim not to overwhelm the image. They are mechanical and rooted in the lamps themselves. The lamps' springs and joints that make noise as they move. This draws more attention to the movement and the magical nature of the lamps moving on their own in the first place. By constructing the lamps realistically, it actually makes the animate lamps seem like they are part of our world as opposed to one purely imaginative. It allows the children to believe (and the adults to believe temporarily) that the lamps are moving when they are not looking. What is also significant about the sound effects is that while Luxo's noises are purely mechanical, Junior's trill is not actually rooted in its structure. There is no spring or joint that would make that noise. That trill therefore adds extra life to Junior's personality. If he can make noises that are not rooted in his structure he seems more like a human or an animal. Junior becomes a magical being with that sound, both inanimate and animate at the same time. The trill also has the added bonus of sounding like a kitten purr and reinforcing Junior's adorable nature.

After the wiggle, Junior departs to get the ball back. To maintain the energy, the cord moves up and down which marks the hops in the little lamp's movement. This is another small detail, but Lasseter marks this as one of the hardest technical elements in the film.<sup>41</sup> The multiple reasons this element is worth the effort. First of all, the cord's presence adds to the mechanical integrity of the lamp because the lamp could not light up without the cord. Second, the cord is a physical embodiment of

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<sup>41</sup>Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Luxo Jr.*

Junior's energy. It exists in stark contrast to Luxo's perfectly still cord. Lastly, the few times later when Junior leaves the shot, the cord reminds us of his presence.

The next few seconds are filled with the two lamps playing with the ball. Junior wiggles again to show confidence before he jumps on top of the ball. As he rolls around on top, he looks around, adding once again an element of exploration to the film. Junior is doing this not just to show off, but also to see what will happen if it rolls around on top of the ball. As we watch Junior roll around on top of the ball, we experience the suspense of waiting to see what happens as well. The film is about this little lamp and what he discovers exploring his world along with being about his father's reactions to such explorations. This innocent ball rolling is his big experiment and therefore the climactic moment of the short film.

The tail end of the climax happens when the small lamp deflates the ball by hopping on top of it. This is marked by a change in the music. Before this point, the music had been a jaunty soundtrack to the little lamp's antics. It contributed to the childlike atmosphere of joy and exploration. This deflation is the first time the music stops completely and the pace of the film slows down in order to linger on the moment the ball deflates. The music's abrupt stop with Junior's mistake allows the little lamp's departure to echo a few moments later and will allow Junior's return to be more powerful because it is reinforced by the return of the music as well. Meanwhile, the quiet juxtaposition with the previous energetic sequences reflects the disappointment in the two lamps as the ball deflates. Our spirits are lowered with the ball. To add insult to injury (and to get a laugh), the small lamp flips the ball over like a pancake. It is indeed dead. This leads to the only dark moment of the film when

Luxo shakes his head at Junior. This is an established parent-child moment that many in the audience can relate to. Junior is completely dejected, as evidence by his complete physical crumpling. He hops off, slowly this time. The fact that the sound echoes here along with the frame's lack of energy without the music make the moment heartbreaking when compared to the joy the little lamp brought to the frame before. There is no happy music, no mystery and no hope of discovery. Luxo is back to being still and there is a moment of complete inaction. The animation is inanimate.

The depression does not last however, and humor comes out of the moment when suddenly Luxo is surprised again. The more jaded in the audience could have assumed the fun was done due to the return to inanimate objects, but in the end the joyful and resilient spirit of the child triumphs. The music starts and the sound of Junior's hopping signals that he is coming back. This time he is pushing a giant beach ball and moving even faster than before. There is one last moment of recognition with the parents when Luxo looks directly at us and shakes his head. The joy at the return takes all the potential anger out of this gesture and leaves it as one of resigned acceptance of his son's crazy antics. In the end, Luxo's playful little son has learned nothing, but we can embrace the joy in his happy and unfailingly positive spirit.

The reason this small film calls for close analysis is because it packs so much into a short period of time. There are many limitations to this piece. It is at the mercy of new technology with limited money and rendering capabilities.<sup>42</sup> The piece stretches the studio to its creative and technical limits. The team has to tell a story in two minutes or less. Lasseter has to make the most of his character's physicality and

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<sup>42</sup> Paik, Pg. 59.

he has to time his emotional shifts right to have the most impact. By learning with the limitations in place, he can use what worked in his future films: both feature length and short. Details like the Junior's wiggle never disappear in Pixar's later works. There are always moments superfluous to the plot, yet essential for the personality of the characters. These moments take extra time and care, but add to the emotional resonance of the film as a whole. They give the characters appeal, which to Thomas and Johnson is "anything that a person likes to see, a quality of charm, pleasing design, simplicity, communication, and magnetism."<sup>43</sup> The characters in this piece did not have to be anything more than stock characters to demonstrate the technology, yet they have personality and fully enact a traditional and touching relationship. Using *Luxo Jr.* Pixar branded itself with characters like Junior, the willingness to test technical limitations while effectively working within the necessary restrictions, and by refusing to settle for the lowest common denominator when it comes to story.

Since this film was made in response to Ed Catmull's request for a film to define Pixar, every choice made for *Luxo Jr.* was a choice made for Pixar's legacy. It is therefore worth identifying the elements in this short that can be found in every Pixar movie since. One element is the link between technology and story present in *Luxo Jr.*'s origins. There is also the attention to detail, whether it is the precise sound script or Junior's wiggle. These elements go beyond simple requirements for comprehension and give the story personality. Sophisticated technology, meticulous detail, and ambitious storytelling: these are the basic requirements for a Pixar film.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas and Johnson, Pg. 68.

*Luxo Jr.* also starts the tradition of heartwarming Pixar shorts. Thematically *Luxo Jr.* draws on a parent and child theme that is found in many, but not all Pixar movies. This makes sense with their intended audience because most of them will be parents and children. *Luxo Jr.* is not just “family entertainment” however and is the first Pixar piece of many to draw upon the idea of adventure and exploration. These are universal topics relevant to all ages. Facing risk and learning from failure are two classic storytelling elements that Pixar begins to see as emotionally effective starting with *Luxo Jr.* For example in *Toy Story*, the toys Woody and Buzz get lost, panic, and have to learn how to work together in order to return to those they love. Along the way, they have an adventure. In *Luxo Jr.*, the lamp does not go anywhere, but that does not mean there is not a sense of adventure or experiencing new things. Junior is an explorer and his adventure is playing with the ball. The joy he gets in this process and his discoveries inspire a joy that never disappears in the Pixar canon. By exemplifying true “heart,” a sense of adventure, and devotion to loved ones, *Luxo Jr.* is the quintessential Pixar short.

If *Luxo Jr.* proves Pixar’s ability to create and physicalize characters as well as introduce us to many of Pixar’s common themes, *Red’s Dream* works to prove the team’s ability to create expressive worlds. The team did this to serve a story of an undervalued unicycle who dreams of being a circus star. Part of the goal behind *Red’s Dream* is once again melding story and technology. The film is a hybrid piece that combines Lasseter’s storytelling, Bill Reeves’ work on rain and Eben Ostby’s work

on bikes.<sup>44</sup> With this in mind, the challenge becomes how one fuses together the sad element of rain with Lasseter's initial story pitch, which was about an inept clown, and bikes, objects with no inherent emotional qualities.<sup>45</sup> The solution is allowing the world to express the emotions of characters and by doing so create an homage to film noir. The twist is that this time the harsh, cruel world is not punishing a man with a fedora, but instead is crushing the dreams of an innocent unicycle. This takes advantage of Lasseter's skill at inserting life into the lifeless and through that process, portraying a unique perspective on the world. This time he is theorizing what it is like to be a unicycle instead of a lamp. The end result uses the same efficient storytelling, sound design, and character body language the studio learned in *Luxo Jr.* while adding to the emotional resonance through world building. This process comes across as a learning experiment more so than *Luxo Jr.* as the team works to balance the new world with character and action.

The most obvious difference between the two films is that there is now a detailed background. In *Luxo Jr.* the background is a simple black backdrop with a wooden table. *Red's Dream*, on the other hand, begins with a montage of establishing shots portraying a city and a bike shop. While this is not the first time Pixar has used backgrounds (*Andre and Wally Bee* has a forest) this is the first time it is a layered, varied background that evokes a plausible and active setting with which the characters can engage. The content of the shots as well as the method used to portray them exhibit both advances in technology as well as Pixar's expressive filmmaking

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<sup>44</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Red's Dream*. Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1987. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>45</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Red's Dream*.

ability. It is a new step for Pixar to make the world an interactive part of the story as opposed to a stage whose only function is to highlight the characters. The added dimension alludes to a world beyond what is on the screen and foreshadows the future work the studio will do in expansive universes.

This is a world to be explored and the film uses its first minute to do so. Instead of the patient introduction of a character like in *Luxo Jr.*, this is a patient introduction of the setting. This difference demonstrates each film's separate priorities. The film takes place in an abandoned city on a rainy night. There are no animate figures and the movement in the frames is limited to the rain. This makes sense, seeing as part of the film's purpose was to show off the technology behind making it rain.<sup>46</sup> There are richer colors than in *Luxo Jr.*, which were predominately beiges and greys. Instead, this city is populated with rich primary colors. They are colors that could be bright and cheerful without this oppressively bad weather. There is mood lighting provided by the street lamps. Each light is sourced and they all have two purposes: they emphasize the darkness of the rest of the frame, and they show off new technology in the way they are reflected in puddles.<sup>47</sup> Most noticeably, when the "Eben's Bikes" lights up, its fizzle works to add to the depressing nature of the place.

The bleakness of this setting sets a tone for the rest of the film. If Red had just cycled into his dream circus from Act Two without the introduction of the city, the reasons for his eventual sadness would not be obvious. When he juggles to show off, it would not be charming; instead it would be arrogant. Red gets the license to be a

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<sup>46</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Red's Dream*.

<sup>47</sup> Amidi, Amid. *The Art of Pixar Short Films*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2009. Pg. 21.

show off because we know in "real life" he lives in a place where he is alone and unloved. We are primed for melancholy with the dark hues of the city and the rain. Red is stuck living in this depressing world and is the only live thing in frame making his plight all the sadder. Red is truly alone so the audience is ready to sympathize when he starts dreaming.

As opposed to the tableau of *Luxo Jr.*, the camera moves fluidly through this world before it reaches Red's mind. This is one of the first examples of the computer graphics difference. The form has a different feel than the hand drawn animation, which still appears to have one flat layer on top of another. The computer animation does not feel "flat." Instead it feels like the camera could move forward and turn, trying different angles, and by doing so leave no corner unexplored. It moves like live action, except that artists are creating each aspect of the world as they go instead of staging it. The computer gives them this power and this power includes angles that were impossible even to the most skilled hand-drawn animators. It is also camera work that links the world to the character. The beginning is a slow track in that starts with wide shots of the city, but it ends with Red's mind. We start with street lamps and wide shots of the city streets. Then we have a curb shot that tilts up to the shop sign. Last, we have a shot of the other bikes and Red in the corner. There are few cuts and the forward momentum connects these apparently disparate images. It mimics a slow track in. Each shot gets us closer and closer to Red, starting with city, reaching the shop, and ending in his sale corner where Red leans against the wall all by himself. Red is part of this world and the world is a reflection of Red's emotions. The progressive zoom in places Red as small, pointing out that Red would only be an

insignificant detail of this city if the camera did not happen to focus on him. Since he is the last thing the camera lands upon, however, he becomes our object of interest.

The final expressive element in this opening montage is sound. It begins exclusively with rain and then a single instrument, the saxophone. The rain and the music are sad and lonely clichés. The steady downfall makes the mood pervasive. This is not a drizzle or a temporary storm, this rain will keep people inside for a long time and our unicycle is doomed to sit in his shop until everyone comes out. The saxophone is a mournful saxophone. It has no accompaniment and plays the blues. These sounds add weight to this depressing world, and as opposed to the short *The Blue Umbrella* (2013), which will come out much later, this world takes no joy in its rain. It is just gloomy.

When the film enters its second act, it enters Red's head and we experience his dream. The dream world is more similar to *Luxo Jr.* except the colors are brighter. There is a black background and the only lighting is a spotlight. This will highlight the movement of Red and Lumpy the clown who is about to be introduced. The major aesthetic difference between the *Luxo Jr.* tableau and the circus is the design of Junior's ball painted on the floor. For the uninitiated, it is a signal that it is a circus and provides a burst of color to the bottom of the frame. For those familiar with the canon, this detail along with the *Andre and Wally Bee* clock on the wall in the store works to connect the three movies. The studio is defining itself as an entity and branding itself with the work they have done before. This trend will continue into the features, as characters from previous films will appear as small details in the background. Since each film has a different group of people working on it (even if it's

just a different variation of previous employees), the one thing these films have in common is that they are all Pixar films. These additions demonstrate that the studio believes that brand means something.

The next part of the scene starts with a drumroll, which builds suspense and drama for the clown's entrance. After he arrives, the silence is oppressive. Once again, this world seems lonely and depressing. As opposed to a big, colorful big top with lots of people and performers, this is a single performer in what appears briefly as an empty auditorium. After this, stereotypical circus music starts. The song is familiar and therefore does not draw our attention away from the clown and Red, whom the clown is riding. This sequence introduces Lumpy the clown who will become the scapegoat for the latter part of the film. Lumpy is not as significant a character as Red, but he is the first Pixar attempt at a humanoid figure. He is dressed in ugly contrasting colors and his rough nature is somewhat masked by his clown make-up. He is supposed to look silly, but he also ends up being one of the most "cartoony" figures Pixar has created. He has no emotional arc and adding on to his ridiculous appearance, all we really know about his personality is that he is not a very good performer. All he does is juggle. His lack of personality makes him the complete opposite of characters like Luxo and Junior. He is there as a tool in *Red's Dream* and nothing more.

The editing also changes in the dream world. It gets quicker and has an energy similar to *Luxo Jr.*'s once the show starts. The shot scales the filmmakers choose to use tell the story of Red's relationship with Lumpy. During the first portion of the segment Lumpy rides Red in circles as he juggles. Even though the characters are one

unit, the camera separates them via shot scales and cutting. It establishes that they are not friends and primes the audience to root for Red stealing the show. Lumpy at no point acknowledges Red as anything more than a tool and only the camera draws our focus to Red during this initial performance. If Lumpy saw Red as a partner, our alignment might shift to him and make Red's later actions appear unfair and obnoxious. As it stands, however, Red remains our subjugated protagonist. By using the cutting to establish Lumpy as a separate entity and not one half of a team, the audience stays on the side of the sad lonely unicycle.

The first turning point of the second act is when Red establishes himself as an animate figure and steals the attention away from Lumpy. He starts to wheel away from underneath Lumpy and throw back the balls Lumpy drops. By doing so, he inserts himself into the act. It is also our major introduction to Red's personality. He is playful and exploratory, like Junior, and also like Junior, he is animated true to his mechanical structure. His movements are all plays on the way a unicycle moves when ridden. There is no abuse of cartoon physics, at least not yet. This is the most lighthearted section of the film because we actually get to see Red star in a show and enjoy himself. The tone is lighthearted and fun because Red is lighthearted and fun. As we learn more about Red as an individual, the editing continues to establish the relationship between Lumpy and Red. It divides the two characters up and there are more single shots of either Red or Lumpy as opposed to Red and Lumpy. The editing establishes them in opposition to each other as opposed to one unit.

What follows this sequence is the most clichéd cartoon moment of these specific portfolio films. Red decides to remain at the side of the stage as Lumpy

continues to unicycle without him. Lumpy does not realize Red has left him and continues to act like he is performing normally. The next turning point is at the two-minute mark when Red turns to the camera and shakes head in response to Lumpy's obliviousness. When he sees Red wheeling off to the side, he pauses, looks down, and then falls. This takes advantage of cartoon physics due to the obvious impossibility of it happening in real life. Pixar will very rarely do this later as it tries to create worlds plausible enough for the audience to relate to. The exceptions will be seen in their comedies when they are participating in a more complicated tradition. These pratfalls make people laugh, but they do not inspire the imagination like a recognizable inanimate object coming to life. The music meanwhile stops to punctuate the moment Lumpy realizes his folly just like it punctuates the important moments in *Luxo Jr.*. As opposed to the silence contributing to the deflating of the ball however, this is all about the laugh and Lumpy's terror as he falls. By making him so ridiculous in appearance and action, it is once again easier to side with Red because there is very little human about Lumpy. Pixar will work later on developing sympathetic villains, but Lumpy fulfills his final purpose here by being an easy target for Red's brief, imaginary triumph.

This turning point is also a defining moment for Red. By shaking his head, Red cements his alignment with the audience by being the creature of reason within the world. He knows that the clown wheeling around without him is impossible and he breaks the fourth wall to tell us so. Just like Junior's wiggle, his head shaking is a loaded gesture that gives him appeal. He also exhibits the same exasperation as Luxo as he shakes his head at us when the clown messes up. By fusing these two things

together, Red does not come across as either child or parent, but a mix. He is old enough to be pursuing its dreams and to be a voice of reason, but not old enough to be set in his ways or have given up on his dreams yet. The characters have grown in age just as the group at Pixar has. Red's adolescence mirrors their own as a company. They know what they want to create and are trying out various ways to get there.

The last minute of the film is a mix of triumph and pain as Red gets applause and his own spotlight after Lumpy falls. What should be a moment of celebration however turns into one of sadness. The first notable sign that something is wrong is when Red starts bowing. Even with Lumpy's pratfall, Red has maintained his mechanical integrity so far. The only break in his mechanical integrity is the bowing at the end when his supposedly rigid neck bends over. There is a possible reason for this other than the filmmakers making a mistake about their predetermined rules. The audience has already bought a live unicycle with a mind of its own and the ability to juggle. This unicycle getting applause for juggling is just as preposterous as the idea of a bike bar that could bend. The unrealistic action is therefore tied to an unrealistic, unsustainable dream. Due to the forthcoming, unhappy end, this is a cynical, but sadly accurate notion. It is the filmmakers shattering the magic they created.

As Red is bowing, sound is a more obvious sign of changing fortunes. A transition from applause to rain guides the viewer out of Red's mind and back into the bike shop. It links the two and reminds the viewer that this has all been a sad fantasy. We have come full circle and the rain from the beginning of the film is all the applause Red will ever get. The start of the saxophone again cements this depressing transition and the dripping into the bucket adds insult to injury. Meanwhile, along

with the sound change, there is a color transition out of the dream is to a world briefly of just black, white, and red. Not only is Red not a star, he exists in a world deprived of color and therefore of life. His only lighting is the blinking “Eben’s Bike” sign and the lights in the corner shining on the sale sign. His time in the spotlight is literally done. This is punctuated by a brief epilogue to add to the tragedy. Red bumps his head against the wall and undergoes a symbolic death as he turns back into a normal unicycle. This is why John Lasseter jokingly refers to this film as “Pixar’s Blue Period.”<sup>48</sup> While most Pixar films reward their dreamers, this film has the distinction of being the only Pixar piece with a sad ending. The atmosphere created in Red’s Dream and its melancholy tone makes this unsurprising. Red does not get to live out his dream and he has done nothing to deserve his fate. The only reason is that the world is a cruel place.

Pixar returns to happy endings with their next film. *Tin Toy* was made in 1988, two years after *Luxo Jr.* and a year after *Red’s Dream*. The film is an example of the final key component of basic Pixar storytelling, which is a fully realized plot with significant and elaborate action. All three films until this point had played with the idea of “what is it like to be a [blank]?” *Luxo Jr.*, however, is so short that the plot remains relatively simple, serving to explore a relationship as opposed to a world. *Red’s Dream* is so expressive that most of its time is taken up by expository shots instead of action therefore making it all about the world as opposed to the characters. *Tin Toy* changes this pattern. It is a longer, fully packed story that adds action and a complex character relationship to the expressive landscape. It fully explores the idea

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<sup>48</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Red’s Dream*.

of what it is like to be toy being played with by a baby along with exploring the relationship between the baby and the toy. In *Tin Toy* we get a full situation and situations lead to plots and plots leads to fuller and longer movies. In order to make these fuller and longer movies emotionally effective, the team continues to use the character building and atmosphere building of the latter two films.

The first shot of *Tin Toy* after the credits is the introduction of our main protagonist, Tinny. It has the efficiency of the *Luxo Jr.* storytelling as well as the rich detail of *Red's Dream*. It is a single shot that uses a moving camera. The camera begins on a wood-grain floor and tracks right to show off a grey bag, the Tin Toy box, baby toys and then stops when it gets to Tinny the one man band toy. There is a tilt upwards to put Tinny in a medium close-up where his eyes start moving back and forth. This shot gives the audience a significant amount of information in just 20 seconds. At its most basic level, it introduces the audience to the few feet of floor in front of the coffee table in which most of the action will take place. It highlights three major props other than Tinny (the bag, the box, and the toys) that will become key to the plot later on, while the presence of the toys foreshadow the future presence of a baby. Finally, it introduces Tinny, who is marked as our protagonist by the title and the box. He is clearly a toy, but he is also alive as evidenced by the brief movement of his eyes. The curiosity behind that movement and box indicate that Tinny is a new toy who will have to learn along with the audience about this world. By the end of this one shot, the audience knows where everything is going to happen, what is going to be used in the action and whom they are going to align with. That brief eye

movement is used to cement our alignment because not only are the filmmakers telling us to focus on him, he also shares our curiosity and confusion.

For most of this shot there is a jaunty score that sets the playful tone of the film, but towards the end of the shot that music fades and a TV is heard in the background. That TV is a subtle indication that this world is bigger than Tinny. It takes place within a universe similar to ours even if that universe is not expanded upon during this series of events. Its sound also corresponds to the moment Tinny moves his eyes, therefore providing an inspiration for his coming alive as he searches for the source of the noise. He is a curious creature much like Junior and Red. The next couple of shots introduces the audience to the off-screen space indicated by the TV and establishes the rest of the living room. It is empty except for Tinny. The TV indicates a sort of presence that alludes to that bigger world, but for now it is just Tinny. The emptiness will also keep the forthcoming baby's focus on Tinny, making him the sole solution to the baby's problem, and setting up the later gag of the toys under the couch. At this point in the film, however, the eyes' and the TV's greatest function is to pique the audience's curiosity about what is going to happen next.

It takes almost a full minute for the baby to enter the film. His entrance is signaled off-screen by faint baby noises that catch Tinny's attention. His attention shifts away from the TV and towards the doorway. The moment is punctuated by the plume on the top of Tinny's hat wobbling in surprise. That plume will be the most expressive part of Tinny and functions the same way as Luxo Jr.'s wiggle, giving Tinny a quirk and personality. This is in addition to his face and elaborate body with the band attached to him. It is a moment of Pixar maintaining what worked when

there were limitations even when those limitations have been lifted. Just as Luxo and Junior could have settled being stock characters, Tinny could just use his face to exhibit emotions like older cartoons relied on faces. The plume instead makes him unique. Our attention, however, shifts from Tinny when the baby enters. He enters through an empty doorway with Tinny in the foreground with his back to us. All attention is on that empty doorway and what is going to come through it. In this case it is Pixar's creative and technical team's first full attempt at a human figure (Lumpy's status as a clown disqualifies him). He is eerily realistic, but at the same time the technology is limited and his appearance is similar to that of the clown, lumpy and awkward. One way that Pixar salvages his unnatural look is having a real baby voice him. From this point forward the soundtrack is full of baby babble, reminding the audience of the adorable and innocent nature of this monster.

Tinny's first reaction to the baby is natural joy at this relatively cute creature. There is an exchange of shots of Tinny observing the baby as the baby gets settled in the living room environment. After this brief readjustment, there is a turning point in the narrative. The baby picks up a blue ring, observes it innocently, and then bites down on it with drool falling down onto the floor. It is immediately followed by a reaction shot of Tinny switching from happy to scared, complete with a plume wiggle. This is the moment when the baby changes from an innocent to a threat. This baby is not a friend to toys and Tinny realizes he could be the next victim. This begins the middle part of the narrative, with Tinny attempting to avoid and run away from the baby. The moment is punctuated with the baby shaking the blue ring violently. The game is on.

There is a second sequence to further cement the baby as an antagonist in Tinny's eyes. First, the baby picks up the beads that were sitting amongst the baby toys in the initial opening shot. He shakes them just like the blue ring and they go flying across the room. This sets up a gag where Tinny has to shield himself from huge oncoming beads with just his accordion. Once again, fear lives in the plume on Tinny's hat as one of the beads strikes it, making it vibrate. This is meant for a laugh, but it is also there to further emphasize how threatening this cute baby world is to a toy. Not only is there a monster baby, but also there are killer beads.

This is followed by a moment when you think the baby is about to start crying. He stops babbling, pauses, winds up, and then sneezes. It is a break in the montage of the baby behaving like a monster and functions like the babble to remind us of the child's true nature. It is adorable, funny, and also reminds us that babies can and will cry. This will become important later on at the film's second turning point. This is a moment to build sympathy for this baby who risks losing his inherent lovable nature when he became a monster in Tinny's eyes.

After these two moments, the action starts. It begins only after the characters and environment have been established. Tinny has a problem he needs to solve, in that he needs to get away from this baby. The core of the second act will be him trying to do so. First, he tries simply backing up. This attempt introduces his first impediment. Tinny is a one-man band and therefore his function as a toy is to play music as he moves. This is fun for a toy, but bad for an escape. He steps back, his drum plays a note, and his cymbal crashes. Once again we are treated to a plume wiggle, as both Tinny and the audience are startled by the music. He tries to turn

around, and it does not work. The sound comes in to punctuate his disappointment with the fizzle of an accordion. Tinny is stuck.

Like a horror film, now that Tinny is stuck the worst happens and the next shot is the baby noticing Tinny. A chase commences with the baby laughing and waddling after Tinny as Tinny panics and plays music as he runs away. This consists of 13 shots over about 25 seconds. This is the quickest and most varied editing that the Pixar team has done so far. The film alternates medium close ups and medium shots of the baby and Tinny as they traverse the living room. The most obvious ending to the chase is when Tinny ends up running inside his own box. This is preceded, however, by a shot that breaks with the style and therefore demands a different form of attention than the climax. The shot before it is Tinny looking up and we get a shot of the baby from the exact angle of Tinny's position. We get Tinny's point-of-view, which is the most subjective shot we have had so far. The baby looks monstrous and the audience gets a moment of visceral access to Tinny's fear. We are placed not only in the world of the toy, but also in the eyes of the toy. This is subtler than Red's dream sequence and is a more sophisticated device to align us with our protagonist. We might not even be aware we have access, yet reap the benefits of knowing that to Tinny, this is not a dream; this is real.

When Tinny runs into the box, it is an abrupt end to the action. It is also a brief joke because Tinny keeps running, apparently unaware of his imprisonment. When he realizes his own situation, he looks up scared. What follows is the same point-of-view shot as before, but one key difference makes it the most striking shot of the film. Since Tinny is stuck in the box, he sees the baby through its crinkled,

reflective plastic packaging. Its purpose is double. Just like the point-of-view shot from before, it is a scary shot. Not only is the baby big and threatening, he is now warped. Since “story is king,” at Pixar, that is its most important function.<sup>49</sup> It is however important to note how technically complex that shot is. The light has to get refracted and the clear packaging’s texture has to register on screen. The shot is convincing and the technology is not rudimentary like the baby making it easy to notice. It is a shot that still works more than two decades later. It is also superfluous to the plot like Tinny’s plume. It is a perspective shot. The filmmakers could have captured the moment with an easier camera angle, yet chose to test the boundaries of technology while adding to the story. Catmull says that:

When filmmakers, industrial designers, software designers, or people in any other creative profession merely cut up and reassemble what has come before, it gives the illusion of creativity, but it is craft without art. Craft is what we are expected to know; art is the unexpected use of our craft.<sup>50</sup>

This use of the plastic is indeed unexpected and the repeated challenging of themselves points to Pixar as a studio with artistic goals that supersede convenient ones. It would have been simpler not to have the plastic, but it would not have been as interesting.

The box problem is solved quickly, as Tinny incorporates his spinning move to turn him around and exit the box, thus ending the chase as Tinny runs under the couch. This is the beginning of the third and most emotional act of the film. It starts,

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<sup>49</sup> Catmull, pg. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Catmull, pg. 196.

however, with another joke. This gag is the gag that Lasseter considers one of the funniest moments in Pixar history.<sup>51</sup> Tinny regains his composure under the couch and slowly turns to his left where he sees a huge group of toys staring at him and shaking in terror. The living room was not empty after all; the baby had just scared an entire community of toys under the couch. Lasseter likes this shot because it explains to the parents why all toys get lost under the couch or under the bed.<sup>52</sup> It is not a child's carelessness; instead it is a toy's choice. This is a significant step in Pixar history because it combines character and world building. These inanimate objects are not only alive, but they have lives and worlds different than our own. Most intriguingly, though, is that even within these foreign worlds, they act a lot like a human would. Instead of asking the question "what is it like to be a toy?" it asks, "What would you be like as a toy?" Or perhaps, "what about a toy's life can we use to make sense of our own?" While *Luxo Jr.* and *Red's Dream* limited their explorations to mimicking human activity, *Tin Toy* is more creative and takes its world building to the next level. Pixar will build on this later on in features like *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, and *Monsters Inc.*, to name just a few.

After this momentary laugh and realization, the story will shift to more complex territory that will cause Tinny to grow and change. Immediately following the couch reveal, the baby falls as he searches for Tinny. He starts to cry and the monstrous veneer from the chase disappears. He is back to being a baby again and now he is sad. Tinny responds with a look of concern and there is a back and forth as

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<sup>51</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Tin Toy*. Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1988. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>52</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Tin Toy*.

Tinny decides if he needs to do anything. On one hand, the baby did see their chase as a game. He is an innocent creature who meant no harm, ultimately caused no harm, and therefore deserves no punishment. On the other hand, this does not negate the terror Tinny felt in the baby's presence. His decision-making is represented by his eyes going back and forth between the crying baby and the shaking toys, each representing one pole of his conflicting emotions. In the end, Tinny looks defeated. He crumples, feeling guilty, but as he does so his accordion makes a disappointed noise. This gives Tinny an idea and he smiles and looks up. This short sequence physicalizes Tinny's epiphany. He has realized that as a toy he has the power to make the baby feel better and he is going to take advantage of it.

The next sequence is Tinny reveling in his newfound power. He puts on a show for the baby moving around him: he smiles and plays music. The show works and the baby stops crying. This celebration, however, is crushed with a brief moment of terror as the baby picks up Tinny. It seems as if his worse fears from the chase are coming true, but the shaking proves to be inconsequential. Tinny is not harmed and the baby abruptly stops shaking Tinny anyway. His reason is not in fact compassion, but distraction. Tinny looks up annoyed at this turn in events and there is a cut to the baby playing with a bag. To the baby, this bag is more fun. This leads to the closing sequence, which is a comedic reversal of the main action from the middle of the film. Tinny chases the baby, looking for his attention, and the baby is too busy playing with the packaging. In the end, the infant does not recognize the great character growth the audience has witnessed. He's too busy playing, just like he should be.

*Tin Toy* has far more extensive action and cinematic techniques than *Luxo Jr.* and *Red's Dream*. Character growth is exhibited through action and the atmosphere supports the action without distracting from it. *Tin Toy*'s emotional advancement is the fact that the protagonist grows and changes in the brief period of the film. We do not just get shown this character; we get to experience what it is like to be a tin toy. This is the final step that will ready Pixar for future films, feature-length and short. They have learned how to create character, create an expressive atmosphere and how to tell full stories that have never been told before in imaginative worlds. *Tin Toy* is the final fusion of all those elements.

These three films point Pixar in the direction of the features they will become famous for. As the Pixar artists develop their filmmaking techniques, these films became the artists' testing grounds for discovering the short film medium. *Luxo Jr.*, even though it is the first film of this grouping, is the closest to being a completely developed short film. Despite its short length, it tells a fully developed story that carries the audience through three distinct emotions. It develops two characters that have a relationship. Lastly there is a conflict and a resolution. It is only missing two things, which is a detailed world and character development. The latter is far more important than the former. Even if the limited technology limits the world, the style fits the narrative. Watching the film in 2015 as opposed to 1986 shows very little difference because aesthetics were not sacrificed for technological development. The film is complete and that is why it is the lamp that was used as the brand as opposed to the unicycle.

*Red's Dream* and *Tin Toy* suffer slightly from over ambition and *Tin Toy* less so. Their subsequent stories have the same inherent strengths as *Luxo Jr.*. Each film carries the audience through distinct emotions and has characters that prove their worth silently. It is what distracts from those emotions and characters that is the problem and why they come across as building blocks more than independent entities. *Red's Dream* is the most problematic of the three. While it advances the studio in terms of atmosphere and setting, it is a failed experiment in plotting and character work. Red himself is a typically sympathetic Pixar character, but for once his spirit and struggle is not rewarded. The hopelessness and lack of change regarding his experience makes the film feel incomplete. In the end the story is just sad and the dream does not mean much. All we learn is that this unicycle wants more, but cannot have it. This teaches the artists about endings. While they do not shy from the sadness in their future work, the characters always learn something from their suffering. There is never the same sense of pessimism exhibited in *Red's Dream*. *Red's Dream* is also the first example of the mistake that hurts *Tin Toy* as well. Both films have early prototypes of a human figure. These films also show how far the studio has to go regarding the generation of humanity. If *Luxo Jr.*'s style masked its infant nature in the context of the medium, Lumpy and the baby put it out there for all to see. The unpolished technology ends up being part of the take away from these two films as opposed to the fully polished emotional work.

Along with the computers not being up to speed, the animators have yet to achieve the balance between realism and fantasy with these humanoid characters. As is evident in *Luxo Jr.* and in future Pixar films, emotional realism is a strength of the

studio. Through small gestures and details, parents can relate to Luxo. The details make it believable and almost realistic. He does not have to be human to be relatable. Having a character react in a distinctly human way is not the same as intricately replicating a human figure as best you can. The latter is the downfall of *Red's Dream* and *Tin Toy*. The focus on making the clown and the baby look human makes them look sloppy and a bit creepy. The technology is not there yet and in the minds of some artists, never should go there. Brian McEntee, the art director of Disney's *Beauty and Beast*, says "I don't want to do reality [...] After all, animation is caricature [...] If you push it, if you caricature, then all of a sudden it becomes very interesting."<sup>53</sup> What McEntee is saying here is that animation is an art form that does not and should not require direct replication of real life. The more interesting work comes from artists pushing their own boundaries of reality. They will fully master this balance with reality in 2013 with the short *Blue Umbrella*, but in the case of *Red's Dream* and *Tin Toy*, the artists did not allow themselves to play with the boundaries. Instead, the balance of art and technology that Lasseter laid out so beautifully gets violated because the technology distracts from the story. At the end of the film you want the audience caring about what happens to their favorite characters as opposed to laughing about the creepy, lumpy figures. Alternatively, you also don't want audiences in 2015 noting the outdated technology from 1986. It is blending and masking issue, one they worked around in *Luxo Jr.* by working within their limitations. After these small set backs, the characters in Pixar films always fit the world and it is their feelings as opposed to their appearance that matter the most.

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas, Bob. *Disney's Art of Animation*. New York: Hyperion, 1991. pg. 170.

*Red's Dream* and *Tin Toy* are therefore teaching tools providing lessons both in what to do and what not to do in an animated short.

After *Tin Toy* the studio makes only one more portfolio film, *Knick Knack* (1989), before they get to work on their first feature.<sup>54</sup> These films took the CGI world from technological presentations to a legitimate art form. They proved that computers could be used to tell a story and create sympathetic characters. The lessons learned are present in Pixar's later features and because of their success, animation everywhere. Pixar does not, however, give up the short form after they delve into features. They continue to develop it as its own art form and use it as a proving ground for new technology yet new technologies rarely trump the story being told. Meanwhile, incomplete "short films" can be seen in many of the features. They carry on these shorts' legacies by using the silent story method honed in these films, the character quirks like the wiggle and the plume, and the detailed atmospheres developed in *Red's Dream* and *Tin Toy*. These sequences tend to introduce worlds and a major changes in characters' lives in under five minutes with emotional beats generated through physical action as opposed to dialogue.<sup>55</sup> The efficiency and attention to detail point to a higher level of craftsmanship within the film and are skills that the filmmakers learned while making these early short films. Without them, there wouldn't have been the first fully computer animated film, *Toy Story*, and the whole Pixar legacy would never have existed.

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<sup>54</sup> *Knick Knack* is an experiment in the tradition of comedic cartoons and is therefore more appropriately discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on how Pixar works within such a tradition.

<sup>55</sup> Such sequences are discussed in the conclusion.

### Pixar Does Cartoons: The Comedic Shorts

In Robert Zemeckis' tribute to animation history, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), the protagonist, an animated rabbit named Roger declares "I could never hurt anybody. My whole purpose in life is to make people laugh."<sup>56</sup> With this declaration, Roger speaks to the goal of the most common form of animated short with the longest history: the comedic cartoon. Until 1937's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, this was the format most commonly associated with animation.<sup>57</sup> The format has a complicated history in that it is beloved, but not necessarily respected artistically.<sup>58</sup> Ub Iwerks, the original animator of Mickey Mouse said, "We early animators weren't really artists [...] We were pretty good at gags, usually a lot of old ones and occasionally inventing new comic situations. [...] But we weren't artists."<sup>59</sup> This is similar to Catmull's argument about originality and artistry and how simply doing what has been done before is not artistic. Walt Disney, meanwhile said that an early animator's "work might have been comic, but it wasn't convincing."<sup>60</sup> This changed over time mostly due to Disney's efforts, but in many ways the emotional goals of cartoons did not change. Animation took on new forms, but cartoons' exclusive purpose remained to make people laugh.

Pixar must react to this complicated legacy when it takes on the comedic short form. Their cartoons work to make people laugh in the same way that Disney's early

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<sup>56</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, Joanna Cassidy. Touchstone Pictures, 1988. *Netflix*. Web. 28 March 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, 1958. Pg. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Since my focus is on Pixar specifically, the question of why this is cannot be fully answered in this analysis.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, 1958. Pgs. 148-149.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas, 1958. Pg. 148.

cartoons and Warner Bros.' *Looney Tunes* did, but at the same time they aim for the distinction associated with the Pixar brand. By considering how the studio alters a well-known form we can better see what makes a Pixar film a Pixar film. Pixar's storytellers honor these cartoons and learn from them by taking on their clever, efficient, and amusing structures. They alter them by adding the development that Walt believed was missing in early cartoons by using them to illicit emotions other than laughter and eventually using them to develop character relationships. They learn over time how to best do this and their comedies show a maturation over time primarily connected to building empathy for their protagonists. Their first, *Knick Knack*, makes few alterations on the classic format. The second example, *Lifted* (2006), plays with the idea of a sympathetic protagonist, but does not approach the idea of character development. *Presto* (2008) is their comedic capstone, which both honors the classic cartoon, but also portrays a fully developed relationship with characters that change over the course of the film. These cartoons also provide Pixar with a space to work with more unlikable characters than they typically portray. Comedy is Pixar's refuge for the mean and the incompetent that would detract from their more heartwarming content. These are worlds where Pixar can dare to be edgy.

While the Pixar team did a cartoon called *Andre and Wally Bee* for Lucasfilm in 1984, their first complete comedic short, *Knick Knack*, was released in 1989.<sup>61</sup> *Luxo Jr.* and *Tin Toy* had jokes within them and *Red's Dream* even had the falling gag, but those films all have other purposes that look beyond making their audiences laugh. The laughs are bonuses that add to each film's charm and help to define

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<sup>61</sup> It was also released theatrically in front of *Finding Nemo* in 2003.

characters. They do, however, point to the importance of Pixar mastering comedy so that they can continue to have such moments of appeal in their more complicated material. *Knick Knack* helps the Pixar artists practice that skill since it is Pixar's first film whose exclusive goal is to make us laugh. Lasseter admitted that after all the work that went into *Tin Toy* the team wanted a break, so they undertook a more traditional cartoon, evocative of Warner Brothers' *Looney Tunes*.<sup>62</sup> The biggest lesson that came out of such an experiment is that *Knick Knack* provides one of the cleanest examples of goal oriented story structure in the Pixar canon. The basic concept is that a snowman, trapped in a snow globe, wants to get out and join happier figurines from sunnier locales on the other side of shelf he sits on. The entertainment comes from his increasingly ludicrous attempts to escape from his snow globe. While the film lacks the emotional complexity of *Luxo Jr.* and *Tin Toy*, it is a funny and complete story with a beginning, middle and end. *Knick Knack* introduces a structure of conflict resolution that the Pixar artists will repeat and expand upon in their subsequent films, both comedic and dramatic.

Before anything else is shown in *Knick Knack* the music is introduced. The film is set to a lighthearted original Bobby McFerrin track. The song is mostly acapella and the simple repetition of one phrase. Most importantly, it is happy and tropical. The reasoning behind this is twofold. First of all, it provides amusing juxtaposition for the snowman. This entire world is sunny except for him. It is a reminder of what he wants at every point in the film. It is also important tonally. This

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<sup>62</sup> Lasseter, John. Audio Commentary. *Knick Knack*. Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1989. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

film is always happy. It never goes dark like *Red's Dream* or contains moments of tragedy like the *Luxo Jr.* deflation. This tone is important for differentiating the comedic shorts from those with heart. While later comedic shorts may stretch this principle, this film has an unvarying tone. At no point during this short should we want to do anything but laugh.

After the song starts and we see the title card, the happy world is introduced. The film begins with a montage of knick-knacks collected from various sunny and warm locations. They all bob along to the music and wear sunglasses. It is an introduction to the world of the shelf (including subtly showing off its dimensions like the establishment of the living room in *Tin Toy*). This particular group of knick-knacks is an obnoxiously happy group, but at this point their joy should be contagious for the audience. They have not been on the screen long enough for the joy to be excessive and the audience has not been presented with an alternative. The song is catchy and adds to the relaxed feel to the short. The sequence also lets the audience know that this is another film about inanimate objects brought to life. This is a consistent pattern at this point in Pixar history. At this point each film has a protagonist who is an object brought to life. When it is no longer Lasseter helming each film, there will be different types of protagonists, but at this point in its history this concept is one of the markers of the Pixar brand.

After the sunny figurines are introduced, the film has its first gag. There is a wide shot of the entire happy group followed by a rapid track right to show a snow globe from Alaska all alone at the far edge of the shelf with a grumpy looking snowman inside. The laugh comes from the extreme juxtaposition of the two ends of

the shelf and the misfortune that this poor snowman is stuck where he is. The “Greetings from Alaska!” decal on the snow globe is another joke that capitalizes on the contrast of happy and grumpy. It also makes a joke out of the ignorance of the human world to this snowman’s plight. Since he is not assumed to be alive, the off-screen humans of this universe make light of his suffering and show that the entire world is fixed against him.

The medium close up of the snowman’s face that follows this introduction is key to the rest of the film. If *Luxo Jr.* and *Red’s Dream* did not use faces (or in the case of the clown, barely use faces) and *Tin Toy* introduced the expressive possibilities of the face, *Knick Knack* makes one face in particular its expressive focal point for the entire film. This is keeping with traditional animation. *Luxo Jr.* and *Red’s Dream* achieve something unusual when their characters are identifiable without faces. The traditional Disney shorts all had characters with faces. Bob Thomas explains, “large, expressive eyes gave [a character] a winning personality”<sup>63</sup> and that “until a character becomes a personality it cannot be believed.”<sup>64</sup> While Lasseter managed to give characters personality without facial features, Thomas reminds us of the potential and historical precedent for using faces for character identification. The snowman is evidence of that concept. At a basic level, the snowman’s face is amusing. One eye is bigger than the other and his mouth is just a string of loosely connected charcoal bits. It gives the snowman yet another thing to be grumpy about. For the animators, it is a face ripe with possibility. Having the mouth be a series of charcoal bits makes it easy and fun to manipulate. Along with his mouth

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas, 1958. Pg. 56.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, 1958. Pg. 38.

many of the snowman's expressions will also come from his eyebrows. This is all in stark juxtaposition with the sunny characters whose faces are painted on, change very little, and whose eyes are all covered by sunglasses. The snowman is the most interesting character of this group because he has the most expressive features and therefore the most distinctive personality. In this initial shot, the snowman is glaring at the sunny group (his eyebrows are straight and he is frowning). His glare is key. If he were staring at them longingly or crying about being alone, it would change the tone of the film. He would be a lovable outsider that the audience has an emotional investment in rooting for. Instead, he is just a silly looking antagonist who is jealous of the sunny figurines. While we will align with him because he is the most interesting and therefore the most fun to watch, we will not sympathize with him. He embodies too much negativity. He is too mean to root for.

After establishing the snowman as a character, the film's next logical step is to establish his goal. As he glares at the happy group, the beach babe figurine from Miami waves at the snowman.<sup>65</sup> The babe excites the snowman and her beckoning causes him to shift from grumpiness to desperation. Based on the way his eyebrows raise and the way his hat pops up, this is a sexual attraction. It helps that the woman he is objectifying is literally an object. His desire is a base desire and therefore the stakes remain amusingly low for the audience. If this had been a romantic attraction,

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<sup>65</sup> Intriguingly, in the first iteration of Knick Knack the woman had a much larger chest than in the version that went before *Finding Nemo* (Amidi, *Short Films*, 21). This is only worth noting because it reveals the hidden edge to Pixar. While it has evolved into a family-friendly company whose films never go above the PG rating, its roots pointed to a more adult audience that could appreciate a sex joke. It leads to a more complicated issue involved with Pixar's image and the idea that they are now considered a company that makes "kid's fare." In reality, even if they started censoring their figurines, the works of Pixar are meant for adults and kids alike.

failure on the snowman's part could cause the film to fall into melancholy. This is an important distinction from the love stories Pixar will tackle later in films like *Blue Umbrella* and the features *Up* (2009) and *Wall-E* (2008) amongst others. If this were a love story, he would end the film lost, lonely, and pining for his love as opposed to vaguely annoyed. Ultimately all he wants to do is flirt with a scantily clad beach woman whose only personality so far has come from a wave and slight bobbing along to the music. The lack of sentiment means that the audience can enjoy his attempts to get out because we do not anticipate pain in the face of failure. We are in suspense to see if he makes it, but we are not emotionally invested in his end goal.

The core of *Knick Knack* and many other cartoons is a sequence of various failed attempts to solve the same problem. The sequence uses what Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston call the second principle of animation, which is “anticipation.”<sup>66</sup> The joy in watching the film comes from anticipating what the filmmakers (through the characters) will come up with next. In the case of the snowman, it is all the different methods for breaking the glass. With each iteration, starting with the plastic igloo and ending with TNT, the solutions become more extreme and less plausible. These gags are anticipatory gags, providing the set up for each attempt in one shot, but leaving the failure for the next shot. As Thomas and Johnston explain “The anticipatory moves may not show why he is doing something, but there is no question about what he is doing—or what he is going to do next. Expecting that, the audience can now enjoy the way it is done.”<sup>67</sup> This is not the first time the animators have dealt with anticipation in a Pixar film. *Luxo Jr.*'s

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas and Johnson, Pg. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas and Johnson, Pg. 52.

introductory stillness was an example of such and the baby playing with a bag in *Tin Toy* was another example. In *Knick Knack*, the audience has time in between to wonder how the snowman is going to fail and is then rewarded by seeing the clever method the animator came up with. The best example of this is the penultimate plan which is when the snowman attempts to use a flamethrower to get through the glass. He struggles for a second trying to get the fire to light under the water. In that moment, it seems as if the animators decided to follow the rules of real physics and sabotage the snowman's plan that way. In the next shot, however, the gas abruptly gets lit when neither the audience nor the snowman expects it, sending him backwards. This is yet another moment like Luxo coming to life and Lumpy falling where Pixar animators play with one's sense of reality. The fact that there are so many examples makes sense when the medium is taken into consideration. Animation is entirely man made and manipulated. It can be as fantastical or as real as one wishes. This is another concept that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* jokes about and through the joke, clarifies. In one sequence, Roger the cartoon rabbit appears to be unable get himself out of handcuffs attaching him to the aggravated protagonist, Frank. Both characters withstand pain and anxiety in the face of danger due to this dilemma. After the danger is passed, Frank begins to saw at the cuffs, but before he finishes, Roger slips easily out of his cuffs asking if that makes it easier. His excuse for waiting was that he cannot act "until it is funny."<sup>68</sup> Roger has to follow the old-fashioned comedic rules of cartoon physics, rules motivated by story as opposed to verisimilitude. Since the end goal in *Knick Knack* is not to ultimately to make viewers

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<sup>68</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

feel something due to a shared experience, but instead to make them laugh, the fact that it makes no sense for the snowman to have all these tools available to him means very little. It is funnier for the tools to be there. Since there is already an unwritten contract with the audience that *Knick Knack* is highly ridiculous fiction, the only important thing about the snowman's plans is that they cannot work.

Throughout these attempts, the snowman's expressions range from determined to concerned to frustrated. He is never sad or in pain. The closest he comes to either of those is when his jackhammer goes on the fritz and he looks concerned before his face falls off. It is not out of fear of rejection or low self esteem (which will be common plights for the heroes of future Pixar films), it is simply fear about what is about to happen to his face. He is an object, so his face does not behave like a human's. It can fall off and rearrange itself in order to keep us laughing. The snowman appears to be cognizant of this fact so what he dreads is something we can anticipate with glee. What saves the audience from feeling like sadists (other than the fact that he is an object and according to the rules established so far, not easily harmed) is that he is an angry character and therefore inherently less sympathetic. To make it worse, before each of his ideas, the snowman has an overconfident eyebrow wiggle that he does towards the camera. It is as if he attempting to try and tell the audience "I've got it!" and every time it fails. His hubris makes him a fool on top of being angry and sexually driven.

During these exploits, the audience is given a proxy in the happy figurines watching the snowman. Most of these are brief, relatively static shots of the group looking vaguely concerned. While not very dramatic, they are shots reveal the

ambivalence of these characters to the snowman. The tropical knick-knacks are curious because of the extreme lengths he is taking, but not fully invested. Most amusingly, one of the palm trees keeps smiling and dancing in the background throughout this entire sequence. Like the music, he maintains a hilarious indifference to the snowman's plight. The bored beach babe even looks at her fingernails after the jackhammer incident, undermining the snowman's interest in her. She is actually shallow and despite her wave from before, she does not really care if he joins them or not. If he cannot get out of the globe, he is not worth her time.

The climax of this sequence is also the film's technological climax. At this point the entire sunny crowd (except the happy palm tree) is watching, since the snowman just launched himself backwards due to an accident with a flamethrower. Their sudden attention indicates something larger about to happen. The snowman follows up his flamethrower idea with a pile of TNT, the most dramatic idea yet and the most traditional of cartoon clichés so far (in *Looney Tunes* characters like Wile E. Coyote would frequently get shipped and use various weapons and tools like TNT). This gag is given more screen time as the camera tracks right to reveal the snowman with a trigger hiding behind his plastic igloo. Unsurprisingly, the explosion backfires. Instead of breaking the glass, it sends the world within the snow globe into chaos with a dramatic whirl of snowflakes. These snowflakes are the most advanced use of particle systems yet and getting them to behave naturally was the most difficult problem faced in the short.<sup>69</sup> The new technology is a reminder that this film is still a learning tool for the studio. The team is working on their effects as they study story

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<sup>69</sup> Reeves, Bill. Audio Commentary. *Knick Knack*.

structure. It shows the potential of cartoons. They can have technical aims along with the goal of making people laugh. Every choice in this film can be seen as an experiment and an early education in comedy.

While the explosion is the climax of the snowman's scheming sequence, it is not the climax of the film. Instead it is a turning point. The final act is the build-up and execution of one final joke that takes advantage of the entire story that has come before it. After the snow has settled it is revealed that the explosion has moved the snow globe to the very edge of the shelf. As the snowman looks out the glass to see what happened, his leaning over causes the snow globe to tip off the shelf. While this moment is arguably no more dangerous than any of his stunts from before, the way this gag is presented gives it higher stakes than the previous stunts. First of all, before the snow globe is even tipped, there is wide shot from below the shelf that shows how close the globe is to the edge and how far up it is. The audience sees the height that the snowman is about to fall from, so our fear is visceral. After the snow globe falls, there is yet another shot from below as the snowman falls straight at the camera. His expression is one of pure terror. Meanwhile, the sunny group, with the exception of the happy palm tree, watches with more concern than before.

With the stakes higher, the audience is more invested in how the snowman is going to get out of this. Since it is a cartoon, we assume the snowman will survive. The mystery is what will happen to him instead of dying. As the snowman runs around his snow globe like a hamster, a solution appears out of nowhere. On the floor of the snow globe is an "Emergency Exit" in place of a plug. Once again, its presence makes no sense in the real world of snow globe design, but it is a comedic solution

for the moment and part of the laugh comes from the unlikelihood. The snowman lets himself out of the snow globe and floats gently down. He is finally out of the globe, and he gives the audience a real smile for the first time in the entire film. Ultimately, however, the escape exit is about as useful as it is likely. Victory is short-lived. Over a cut to the sunny crowd looking on, an off-screen noise points to something going wrong. The next shot is a copy of the first shot except instead of grumpily standing in the snow globe, the snowman is grumpily sitting in the fishbowl that broke his fall. The irony is amusing. Furthermore, the fact that the snowman's glare scares the fish in the bowl gives the audience even more clearance to laugh at him. The fish did not do anything to him yet he is cruel to it. He is a cruel character and therefore undeserving of our love. The symmetry between the story's beginning and end reveals the film's grand plan. It was not just a series of gags, but a full story.

Now that the snowman has come full circle, we have closure and the film could end here. Instead, the filmmakers torture the snowman even more and take advantage of symmetry for the second time. For a brief moment it looks like the snowman's efforts have been rewarded (unintentionally) because there is a mermaid in the bowl who looks exactly like the beach babe on the top shelf. The final joke deprives the snowman of his happy ending by timing the snow globe's fall so that it lands on top of him (through the Emergency Exit he used to escape) as he runs towards the mermaid. It ends just as it began, with the snowman trapped in the snow globe, stuck observing the world around him as opposed to participating. He is extra grumpy at the end because he tried so hard for nothing.

While it is an unhappy ending much like *Red's Dream*, it is a funny unhappy ending. The snowman did not deserve the girl and his unlikely misfortune is therefore amusing as opposed to tragic. During *Red* the audience rooted for the unicycle because he was clever and his isolation seemed unfair. He was an underdog and our emotional investment lay in his success. The melancholic atmosphere reinforced this disappointment. *Knick Knack* is different. The snowman is never likable and we care more about being amused than seeing the creepy snowman get what he wants. Our emotional investment is in seeing the animators come up with new ways to get him out of the snow globe rather than in seeing him succeed. We take joy in the ending because it is yet another clever bait and switch that plays with our expectations. Additionally, the atmosphere never switches to the melancholy like in *Red's Dream*. The music, colors and lighting all remain bright. The filmmakers never want us to care about the snowman or share in his disappointment. No lesson is learned. *Luxo* taught us to explore. *Red* taught us to dream. *Tin Toy* taught us about empathy. *Knick Knack* teaches us that there are many ways not to escape a snow globe. The filmmakers do not want us to learn in this film, they want us to have a good time. The only way this works is if we feel safe to laugh at the gags because the humor is at the expense of an antagonist rather than a victim. With that safety established, the filmmakers can feel free to make us laugh and they do. The lack of empathy in this context benefits the film, but empathy for and investment in characters are central pillars of the Pixar brand. While *Knick Knack* masters the basics of comedy, future comedies take up the challenge of integrated empathy for their protagonists while maintaining the same margins of safety.

*Lifted* challenges this idea of an unlikable protagonist in a comedy. Instead of being creepy or angry, *Lifted*'s protagonist is incompetent with the misplaced confidence of a teenager. While not an underdog hero, he does play upon the audience's sympathies more than the snowman did. The film has the basic problem/unattainable solution structure as *Knick Knack*, but the story is not as clear-cut and more of the humor comes through sight gags and plays on genre. *Lifted* also carries on the Pixar tradition of providing an alternate, fantastical explanation for a familiar event.

When *Lifted* begins, all signs point to it being a horror movie. There is only ambient night noise like crickets. The camera shows off a quiet house in the middle of a cornfield. There are individual shots of a porch swing and a windmill that point to something unusual when the swing and the windmill both move on their own (complete with a creak) without justification. These shots are patient and slow in order to let the suspense build. This sequence ends in the bedroom with a sleeping man. It is still quiet and the man lets out a sigh in his sleep. It lulls us into a moment of calm so that the next moment is even scarier. Out of nowhere, accompanied with a big noise, a bright light shines through the window. It is meant to be a jump scare in stark contrast to the slowness of everything else so far. It is immediately followed by a wide shot revealing a flying saucer and a blast of clichéd science fiction music on the soundtrack.

This introduction is a series of deliberate alien invasion movie clichés. One of the comedic strategies of the film is to play with the familiar, using Thomas and Johnston's theory of anticipation. This time, however, the filmmakers develop what

Thomas and Johnston call a “surprise gag, which only works when the audience is expecting one thing, and suddenly, without warning something entirely different happens.”<sup>70</sup> *Lifted* takes advantage of this concept both with small gags and with the film as a whole. The animators want the audience to immediately recognize what is going on as a typical alien abduction that they have seen on screen hundreds of times before. After the reveal of the flying saucer, the film cuts back to the sleeping man being lifted from his bed by an unseen force. The man is pulled toward the window and the view from the camera makes it look like he is going to float through the window with no problem. The music increases and then the man hits the wall with a big “thunk!” This is an example of a small surprise gag. We thought the man was going to go through and we are supposed to get a laugh out of the fact that he does not. It is also a surprise in relation to everything that has happened before it. If the audience has seen alien abductions on screen before, we have not seen a botched abduction by an inept alien. To emphasize the point, the man is thrown against the wall a few more times. This establishes the film’s goal. The aliens want to get this man out of the house and into the flying saucer, but are incapable of doing so. It is also the moment that establishes the film’s tone. This is not the horror film we anticipated. Instead, it is funny. With goal and tone established, the film takes on the comedic structure of *Knick Knack*.

When the filmmakers introduce the protagonists they reveal the story behind his incompetence. This is the other element of the film that plays on the audience’s familiarities. The big reveal is that the alien behind this abduction is actually just a

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas and Johnson, Pg. 52.

kid taking the alien equivalent of his driver's test. He keeps hitting the wrong lever and the hologram meant to guide him keeps lighting up red and buzzing. Meanwhile, a big alien watches him with a clipboard and a neutral, unfriendly expression. In the end, this big mysterious event is something hilariously mundane. The soundtrack emphasizes this because the alien music has cut out and the only noise in the saucer is the creaks of movement from the little alien and the static from the fluorescent lights. This mundane set up also lowers the stakes. The audience should be vaguely familiar with a world like this because it looks like a DMV. Since the DMV has harmless connotations, it is easier to believe no harm will come from this situation either. The little alien is also remarkably harmless looking with a small body and big pouty lips. He also wears a helmet several sizes too big with a bent squiggle. He is small and nervous and his childlike qualities will keep him from becoming a threat. Meanwhile, the sequence before showed the man remaining asleep and unharmed even as he was thrown against the wall repeatedly. We are safely in the realm of a cartoon, where physical harm is meant only for our amusement. This is not a horror film where bad things are going to happen to the sleeping man. This is a comedy where hijinks without consequences will ensue.

The little alien is a different type of comedic protagonist than the snowman from *Knick Knack*. He is more pathetic than antagonistic. Modeled after a teenage boy learning to drive, we know from experience that his goal is more important to him than anybody else. This makes it safe to laugh at him when he fails. His helmet and squiggle are the equivalent to the Tin Toy's plume, straightening and bending according to his emotions. The helmet emphasizes that he is a kid, not a professional,

and is not ready to be doing what he is attempting to do. All of this is further stressed with the presence of the examiner. He is a big, grumpy looking alien with no compassion towards this little alien. He is doing his job and has no patience for this little alien's nonsense.

The first comedic sequence is based upon the dynamic between the two aliens. The little alien keeps hitting levers and getting the signal from the hologram that he made a mistake. Director Gary Rydstrom said he modeled the control board that the little alien is using after his own soundboard (Rydstrom was originally a sound artist).<sup>71</sup> He explains how confusing and impossible to control soundboards look to an outsider and part of his job is just knowing how to use the equipment. This little alien does not either, but gains some sympathy from the audience in that it does not look like something we could control either. The comedy of this sequence comes from the cuts back to the examiner whose expression never changes as he marks down all of the little alien's mistakes. The little alien keeps looking at him hopefully yet nothing changes.

Part of what keeps the forward momentum of the short are the many times the little alien almost achieves his goal by figuring out what he is doing. Without these moments the short would simply be frustrating. The first of those is a cut to the human during the try and fail sequence when the little alien manages to align him with the window. The alien music escalates out of nowhere indicating possible triumph. The music also helps indicate the ideal goal of the little alien is to be the

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<sup>71</sup> Rydstrom, Gary. Audio Commentary. *Lifted*. Dir. Gary Rydstrom. Pixar Animation Studios, 2006. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

driver behind a horror movie. Instead, as soon as the man is lined up, he launches to the right into the wall and the music cuts out. The little alien is not there yet.

At this point in the narrative *Lifted* distinguishes itself as emotionally different than *Knick Knack*. At no point in *Knick Knack* do we feel sorry for the snowman, yet at this moment in *Lifted* we cut back to the little alien looking sad and dejected with his finger still on the lever. The moment makes the little alien a more sympathetic protagonist. He is also losing self-confidence, starting to believe he cannot pass the test even though he really wants to. This differentiates him from Pixar protagonists before him, specifically characters like Luxo Jr. and Tinny. These films both contain tests of character for their protagonists and the way each character responds says something about their inherent strengths and weaknesses. Junior responds to his failure by simply getting another ball and starting again. His childhood innocence makes him resilient and positive. Tinny, when ultimately tested, behaves heroically by deciding to face his fears to help the baby. Tinny, however, is an adult character, nothing about him points to immaturity. This little alien is immature yet old enough not to be as carefree as Junior. His failure says less about his character and more about his age. Unlike the Snowman from *Knick Knack* he is not an unsympathetic soul, it is just that he is not ready to be doing what he is doing.

While the ultimate comedy in the short is rooted in the fact that he cannot actually pass the test, at this point in the story we want him to keep going and not give up. It is also at this moment that we get a point-of-view shot as the little alien looks at the control board. We get a first hand account of just how mysterious and confusing this board is. Rydstrom designed it for maximum incomprehension: all the

levers look the same and are arranged in straight, uniform lines. By gaining access both to the sadness and the confusion of the little alien, we understand his frustration.

The filmmakers follow the little alien's sad moment with one of false confidence. It is important for consistency's sake that the tone of the film returns to comedy. When he gets an idea, the little alien swirls in his chair and gives the big alien a cocky look. As in *Knick Knack*, an arrogant protagonist is an inherently less sympathetic protagonist. This makes it easier for the audience to laugh at him again when he fails. It is also annoying to a character like the big alien. His expressions help ground us in reality. This little alien's actions have consequences and therefore his false confidence is more of a problem. The big alien helps us realize how ridiculous this all is and how incompetent the little alien is.

It is also in this moment when the alien gives up trying to figure out things on his own. His look to the big alien is a question of approval. When the big alien gives him nothing, he switches levers, and keeps looking back for assurance. He is cheating. He is trying to get around the fact that he does not know how to do this and therefore is, again, less sympathetic to the audience. He cannot accept his failure, but also cannot figure out how to fix it. In this sequence we can align with the unsympathetic big alien who does not try to help the little alien at all because he does not deserve it and it is not his job to interfere.

The little alien gets more and more frustrated. It is a build-up of emotional tension that ends in the little alien trying something, failing again, and throwing a tantrum. This tantrum is primarily a release of the tension that has built up so far: the patience of the opening shots, to the indifference of the examiner, and finally the

assorted failures of the little alien. All of these have been restrained actions and this is the first time emotions run high. While we may sympathize with the little alien, because, like him, we have no idea how this machine works either, his tantrum is childish and aggressive and therefore our sympathy is lost. The tantrum also gives us a laugh because even in the face of this extreme action, the examiner stays neutral while the sleeping man gets thrown all over the place, yet remains sleeping throughout. All the tantrum ends up doing is showing the extent of the little alien's immaturity.

This is a turning point in the film, because it is the last of the alien's most desperate attempts to work the system. After this, he takes out a manual to try and figure the driving out with some help. He really forfeited his chance at passing the test with his tantrum and at this point he just wants to finish the job. With this change, the focus of the comedy switches to the sleeping man as opposed to the alien. With the manual's help, the alien actually aligns the man correctly, but the beam is pulling him up backwards. In one of Pixar's cruder jokes, the man's backside gets stuck in the window and each tug from the spaceship reveals his butt crack more and more. Since the man is unfamiliar to the audience as a character, this added humiliation does not feel cruelly unjust. We are the only people who witness it and he will not remember it. All it does is emphasize the ordinariness of this man and juxtaposes it with the extraordinariness of what is happening to him.

After this brief set back, the little alien finally gets his moment of brief triumph. Even if he does it with the man's backside first and through a tree, he gets the man into the spaceship. The music responds accordingly with a triumphant score

still in the style of a classic science fiction film. The little alien has finally done his job and taken on the roll that the audience expected of him. A triumph, however, would not fit his character and unsurprisingly, he messes up again. He gets cocky once again after his win, and instead of finishing the job he turns to the big alien for approval. When he turns, he switches the beam off too early so the man is suspended briefly over an empty hole before falling. The alien got cocky and therefore he failed again.

This failure has the highest stakes seeing as in real life the man would die from such a fall. While the rules of cartoon physics have been honored up until this point by the lack of harm that has come to the man, the rules are broken in this moment for story purposes since the film needs a dramatic climax like the snow globe fall in *Knick Knack*. Therefore, these new stakes are indicated to us by the big alien finally intervening and catching the man (whose abrupt spread-eagled suspension is a conveniently placed *Mission Impossible* reference). This new action also gives the big alien a chance to shine. With his same neutral expression, he shows the little alien how it is done. His body remains rigid as his arms move in a blur controlling the beam. All along, the big alien had this incredible talent he was hiding and he sets everything the way it should be, including pouring water back into a glass and tucking in the man. It further emphasizes just how incompetent the little alien was and it ends the test. When we cut back to the spaceship, the big alien has his hands on the controls to drive away and the little alien crying next to him.

While *Knick Knack* ended at the snowman's final failure, *Lifted* gets an emotional coda to help satisfy the moments the audience sympathized with the little

alien. While there was enough unlikable about him that we are ok with his final failure at his task, this coda makes the film a bit less heartless. The big alien looks over at the little alien, who is sniffing and looking pathetic. For the first time, the big alien's expression changes to a mix of compassion and concern. To try and mollify the little alien, he offers up the controls to fly the saucer away. Ever the child, the little alien responds with exaggerated enthusiasm and a straightened out squiggle. His goals have been at least partially realized.

The filmmakers give us one last laugh with the end. We watch the saucer fly away and then promptly fall back down. The little alien is not even up to his condolence task. In a nod to the man's strange good luck when it comes to not sustaining any harm, his bed is spared when the saucer falls. It was conveniently located where the center of the saucer is and therefore survived after the saucer created a crater of the rest of the landscape. This leads to one last joke in the credits when just through sound, we hear the man get up and then promptly fall off the column in the center of the crater. His luck finally ran out.

*Lifted* is a step in a new direction for Pixar comedy in that it introduces a somewhat sympathetic protagonist. It plays with the idea of inserting sentimental moments into a short dominated with laughs. Most of the time, Pixar stories are the reverse, with sentiment punctuated by moments of comedy. *Knick Knack* is an exception in that at no point are we asked to feel for the snowman. *Lifted* proves that you can still laugh at character you care for. It is a stepping-stone on the way to *Presto*, Pixar's latest comedy, which is by far its most complex because it is rooted in a relationship between two characters as much as it is rooted in single character's

goal. It takes the basic structure learned in *Knick Knack*, the emotional complexity learned in *Lifted*, plus the character relationships learned in the other shorts to create a more polished whole. Out of these three examples, *Presto* is the only comedy where a character learns something at the end of a long series of gags. *Presto*'s elaborate construction and careful manipulation of sympathies show that you can have both complex characters and gags as long as you frame them correctly.

Before *Presto*'s action even begins, the credits point to its grander purpose as a film. It is introduced as "A Pixar Cartoon." This credit has never been used before by Pixar and is presented in a way evocative of the *Silly Symphonies*' and *Looney Tunes*' opening credits. Such homage marks this film as an historical exercise along with being a cartoon whose purpose is to make you laugh. Director Doug Sweetland uses and alters cartoon traditions to make a comedy that is distinctively Pixar while still honoring the past.

*Presto* is the story of a magician, Presto, and his rabbit, Alec. Presto is introduced via a poster advertising his act following the credits, which also introduces us to the world of a magician. It is an exaggerated poster combined with exotic music in order to give Presto an air of mystery and importance. Alec, by contrast, is the first character we meet in the flesh. Alec's one goal in this moment of his life is to get a carrot. The audience is introduced to him off-screen with the sound of a rumbling stomach. He is revealed to be in a cage, with the carrot just out of reach and a "Feed Rabbit" note in the background. This quick set-up explains Alec's plight. He is hungry due to the neglect of his owner and he cannot solve the problem himself. To show the lengths the rabbit will go to satisfy his need, we see Alec struggle against

his cage to get the carrot, even almost tipping it over. Due to the basic nature of his need and because it is due to forces beyond his control, we immediately empathize with the rabbit. It is the *Knick Knack* structure all over again, with a character repeatedly attempting to achieve something just out of reach and failing to do so. This time, however, the character's goal is completely sympathetic.

Immediately after Alec's struggles we are introduced to Presto, whose arrogance will become his defining trait. He bursts in, still chewing, and making a big show over licking his fingers. Cognizant of it or not, he is rubbing it in to Alec that he has had his dinner and enjoyed it. This initial introduction to Presto helps set him up as the antagonist of the piece. His obnoxiousness is combined with haplessness as he checks his watch and panics about the time. He is not the consummate professional he dresses and advertises himself as. Later on this will all be combined with a quick temper, so Presto will embody everything that made the snowman and the little alien so unsympathetic.

The last piece of set up is the introduction of the hats, which are the props that will enable all the gags and main action of the movie. In a brief moment of comedy, these hats are stored in Presto's "underpantaloons" drawer. It is a play on the familiar concept of hiding things in your underwear drawer along with an added moment of pretentiousness to help define Presto further. The introduction of the hats is appropriately dramatic. Presto stares at them as they glow with wonder and a glint in his eye. As director Sweetland points out in the commentary, these hats are the only

magic Presto actually possesses.<sup>72</sup> Without them he would not be a magician so he comes close to worshipping them. Meanwhile, when he pulls them out, he blows into the purple hat to blow the dust out of the black hat and sticks his hand through to dust off the rim with a handkerchief. The gag is slow, patient and has a twofold purpose. The story justification is that Presto handles these hats with obsessive care. The pacing, meanwhile, gives the audience time to process how these hats work: a type of mystical wormhole that connects them. When you stick something in one, it comes out the other. This is how Presto makes a rabbit appear in his show and will become the source of the pranks Alec uses to steal back power from Presto.

This delay in recognition of Alec on Presto's part helps establish his priorities. He cares more about the hats than Alec. When Presto lets Alec out of his cage he does not feed him or even notice the rabbit's struggles to get his carrot. Instead he places him down as if to rehearse the act and is called to the show before he can finish. Presto once again panics and grabs everything before he feeds Alec. Both Presto's arrogance and now his incompetence have denied Alec his goal.

The main action of the short occurs during Presto's magic show. Presto is just as pompous on stage as off. He has an air of snobby dignity communicated through his expressions and rigid body language. Alec, by contrast, has sympathetic body language. He has big expressive eyes and floppy ears that change with his emotions. As Sweetland points out in his commentary, one of his most important details is his

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<sup>72</sup>Sweetland, Doug. Audio Commentary. *Presto*. Dir. Doug Sweetland. Perf. Doug Sweetland. Pixar Animation Studios, 2008. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 2*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2012. DVD.

eyebrows.<sup>73</sup> They are soft and sad as opposed to angry. This was a last minute change by the animators to make sure Alec would always look apologetic about his later antics as opposed to sadistic.<sup>74</sup> They make him an innocent figure as opposed to a trickster like Bugs Bunny from *Looney Tunes*. These subtleties in body language point to an advance in Pixar animation. The studio has moved on from plastic objects and aliens to familiar live beings. Attention and care to detail in body language allows for more subtle character development. Once again, faces give characters personality.

Setting is also key to character motivation. The hall is huge and full of people, and it raises the stakes for Presto. This is not the empty circus of *Red's Dream*; everything Presto does will be on display for the crowd. It gives Presto's actions the consequences *Red's Dream* lacked and his humiliations will be all the more severe. The audience within the film also gives us an access point to this strange cartoon world. We can use the audience's reactions to each trick and antic as a guide to how these gags appear in their reality. We can know what is actually dangerous and what is funny like the spectators in *Knick Knack* and the big alien in *Lifted*. They will also be a joke themselves as they start to unintentionally validate Alec's pranks with applause, believing them to be part of the show.

At this moment in the show Presto keeps Alec off stage so he can pull him out of a hat. This set ups a hierarchy when they are on stage. Presto is the star, and Alec is merely a tool. This relationship and the characters themselves will be challenged and forced to change as the short continues. What we learned backstage is also key for the main gags of the short to work. It needed to be established that Presto is a fool and a

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<sup>73</sup> Rydstrom, Gary. Audio Commentary, *Lifted*.

<sup>74</sup> Rydstrom, Gary. Audio Commentary, *Lifted*.

neglectful one. Alec needed to be set up as a victim of that neglect. These are both important things to have in mind because Alec will use Presto's act as a vehicle to take revenge, or more innocently, to motivate Presto to give him his carrot.

The first indication of the way things will unravel is when Presto sticks his hand in the black hat to pull out Alec. We see him pause, confused, and search around with his hand while trying to keep a neutral face for the audience. While we have yet to know what exactly is wrong, this is the first indication that this act will not go as planned. The lack of audience response adds to the awkwardness of this situation. A delay in the action leaves them bored and disappointed so Presto needs to get Alec out of the hat as quickly as possible in order to have a successful goal. The punch line is revealed in the next cut with Alec standing there, holding the hat off his head, and giving Presto a disappointed look that takes advantage of those eyebrows Sweetland mentioned. This is sabotage. Presto glares at him and gestures at him to cooperate, but Alec slowly shakes his head. The bunny in the cage has now reclaimed power. What was the mistreatment of an underling has now become a clash of equals. To make his point even clearer, he mimes eating a carrot. This is also a nod to the fact that this film has no dialogue and is making use of silent comedy. More use has to be made of the characters' bodies and gestures just like Lasseter had to do with Junior, Red, and Tinny.

What follows this initial joke is a series of escalating gags using the hats. They follow the basic premise of Presto needing Alec to cooperate and Alec refusing to do so. With each new hat gag, the abuse towards Presto becomes more brutal. What starts as humiliation turns into actual physical pain. The filmmakers navigate

this dark territory by delicately setting up each gag so that the rabbit either triggers the gag by accident or is justified in his aggression.

The first escalation is a small one. Presto refuses to satisfy Alec's demands so Alec hits Presto's hand against the table. It is a minor show of force in response to Presto's mistreatment that indicates what Alec is capable of. This does not change things for Presto and he instead of cooperating, he reacts with fury. After trying to save face in front of the audience, he starts to storm off stage toward Alec in a threatening manner. Alec immediately responds in terror with his ears sticking straight up and his eyes going wide. He once again assumes the guise of an innocent and adorable bunny. This moment establishes Presto as a violent threat to Alec.

The next gag sets up how the crowd will play into the rest of the film. To this point, the audience in the theater has been awkwardly silent as Presto has failed to produce a trick. When Alec booby traps the hat with a mousetrap, and Presto pulls his hand out in pain with the trap attached, however, the audience applauds. From now on every abuse leveled at Presto by Alec will come across as one of the magician's tricks.

Alec reminds Presto of what he is really doing this for: he once again pantomimes eating the carrot and gestures towards the hat. All he wants is Presto to throw the carrot through and this will all be over. Presto refuses out of stubbornness and pride. Not only does he not send the carrot through, he tries to reverse the dynamic and throw an egg at Alec through the hat. It is a moment of pettiness to add to the already long list of reasons to dislike Presto. His punishment is swift, however, because Alec flips the hat up and unintentionally sends the egg back through into

Presto's eye. Presto is forced to grimace with egg on his face as he takes a bow before the applauding audience.

The next joke is equally cruel on Presto's part. He teases Alec by turning the carrot into a flower. It is a cheesy magician's gag that does nothing for Presto's act except rub Alec's hunger in his face. It hits Alec where he is most vulnerable. It also shows a shift in goals for Presto. He no longer seems to care about a good show and just cares about taking revenge on Alec. Pulling the focus from the show to the conflict forces the viewer to take sides and since Presto's move is so petty, it is easy to take Alec's side. Alec's next move is to put the hat up a nearby air vent so that Presto's head gets sucked through. It is by far the most brutal prank yet, but was preceded by the cruelest taunt yet. The taunt makes the gag it is safe to laugh at and protects Alec from being unlikable. The vent is something Presto deserved since he is the one who made this a war between enemies as opposed to disagreement between friends.

Presto comes out of this prank with a flushed red face, hair sticking up all over, and the egg still on his face. This is in stark contrast to his pomposity at the beginning of the short. His appearance will continue to reflect his slowly deteriorating inner state and add to his humiliation. His crazed appearance also reflects the manic energy of the short after this point. The gags will happen faster and be more reactionary than calculated. Alec tries one more time to remind Presto of his goal by gesturing about the carrot, but at this point Presto is too deranged to even acknowledge his request.

The following series of gags serve as mini battles (and jokes) in this war between the two characters. They include Alec slamming Presto's hand in a drawer, pulling all his magic things out of his sleeve, and then Presto running at Alec. Alec even executes a maneuver so that Presto ends up pulling off his own pants. Just like the butt gag in *Lifted* the underwear joke is a small moment of crude humor to get a quick laugh in between the more elaborately staged gags. After this the attacks on Presto will involve larger props and require more shots and set up.

The first of these is an elaborate ladder gag. For Presto the pants joke was the last straw and now his only goal is to take revenge on Alec. As he starts toward Alec, Alec's quick response is to look towards a ladder on the side of the stage, assess how long it is, and drop it into the purple hat so it comes up out of the black hat into Presto's crotch. While this first use of the ladder leads to a fairly typical joke, the filmmakers take advantage of the ladder's unique potential after Presto recovers. As Presto sits there on top of the ladder in pain, he gets an idea signaled by a demonic smile. He gets off the ladder and then pushes it back into the black hat like he is loading a spring-loaded gun. Based on the physics established so far, as soon as he releases the ladder, it should launch itself back out of the hat. This plan takes forethought and cruel intentions unlike Alec's reactionary self-defense methods. It plays out, however, like the egg gag. Presto aims his black hat at the rabbit, and Alec responds naturally by hopping out of the way. The ladder instead launches out of the purple hat into a door that springs it backwards. This reversal sends Presto flying across the stage with his chin rapidly hitting each rung of the ladder. This is Presto's own fault. The only thing Alec did was step out of the way.

The ladder gets one more use after this. In his anger, Presto breaks up the ladder into pieces and then uses one of these pieces to smash up the carrot he has reproduced. It is a tantrum akin to *Lifted*, but the little alien never took his anger out on another being. There is no finesse to Presto's beating and no magic. It is pure aggressive fury. It is also Alec's worst nightmare. He witnesses the thing he loves most get smashed into smithereens. This tantrum inspires Alec's retribution for the second time. When Presto sticks his hand back into the hat, Alec quickly points the purple hat at the electrical board so the fingers stick into the socket, electrocuting the magician on stage. It is an escalation without much foresight and in response to another grievous offence so it saves Alec from seeming like a villain. He is cruel, but he has reason to be.

This moment gives the filmmakers a chance to have a brief break in the Presto/Alec narrative. The camera cuts to the orchestra, whose job up to this point has been providing flourishes and drumrolls to punctuate all of Presto and Alec's stunts. Two of the men look up at Presto who is stomping his foot in electrical spasms. They take this as an instruction to play something along with his movements and replace their more traditional orchestral instruments with a washing board and a banjo. They perform the same role as the fictional audience here. There is comedy in them misinterpreting Presto's suffering as instructions. It is also a joke about music in these comedies that these musicians have infinite abilities and instruments. We have accepted all the music as flourishes and background without thinking about its source. This cut gives it a source within the short. This "source" has been complacent with all of the antics and can switch genres and songs at a moment's notice to fit the mood of

the moment or to make us laugh. It is also amusing that these musicians are pretentious looking and neutral about it all. They take their job seriously and do not react to the changing emotions. Just like the big alien in *Lifted* they provide comedic juxtaposition. Meanwhile, the rest of Presto's electrocution looks to the audience in the theater like dancing. This only ends when a short circuit causes an explosion and Presto to fall down in shock.

This is the final gag in this long sequence. It is an appropriate place to end the pattern because it is hard to get crueller than an electrocution and the filmmakers are already testing the limits on Alec's likability. They have also already used almost everything in sight on the stage in order to abuse Presto. After this incident, Presto drops everything and runs after Alec, starting an elaborate chase scene the audience only witnesses as lumps running around behind the curtain. Since the series of gags was so extensive, this scene is simplified and shorter. The details of the chase are not as important after everything that went before. When we finally return to Presto and Alec, it is to witness the climax of the short.

Presto, in the process of going after Alec, gets tied up in the curtain rope. As he reaches through the hats to try and grab Alec, he releases the stick holding the rope down instead. This immediately results in Presto rapidly ascending to the very top of the theater, dangling only by the rope. The unraveling of the rope also opens the curtains, so the audience witnesses Presto's ascent. This is key to the moment because one of the audience members screams. With that scream, the stakes are raised. If the pains from pranks before resulted in few critical consequences, this scream indicates a fall from this height will not be as forgiving, even in this cartoon universe. This is

very similar to the snowman on the precipice of the shelf in *Knick Knack* and how the expressions of the figurines raised the stakes in that moment. The final climax has to have greater consequences even in the comedies.

The situation is dire for Presto and a turning point for Alec. He begins by yelling “Woo hoo!” in triumph and starts to skip off stage when he sees Presto dangling. He clearly does not share the feelings of the audience member who screamed and just does not care if Presto may die. The situation changes, however, before Alec leaves the stage. Therefore, the next cut is the rope breaking and Presto starting to fall along with a set of prop moon and stars up there with him. The crowd gasps at this and it is enough to make Alec freeze in his joyful skip off stage. With Alec safely in place, the focus can shift back to Presto and his fall. While the moment is technically scary, the filmmakers make it funny by continuing to add threats to Presto as he falls. Most notably a piano appears suspended by ropes in mid-air for no apparent reason, except to break and fall after Presto along with the props. The falling piano is a classic cartoon gag and shoehorning it in at the end of this “Pixar Cartoon” is an homage to that tradition.

With the stakes higher than ever, the responsibility falls to Alec to save Presto. He glares at the realization and his annoyance is clear, but his ears flop down, which means he has accepted the job. In comic juxtaposition to the panic of the audience and Presto himself, Alec’s rescue is relatively simple. He sticks his hand in the purple hat, positions the black hat underneath Presto, and holds the purple hat like a rocket launcher so Presto can burst through instead of hitting the ground. Alec’s face does not change from his glare throughout all of this, pointing to the fact that this

takes little to no effort on his part and he is still mad at Presto even if he does not want him to die.

In a final laugh at Presto's expense, Presto does not realize he has been saved until he is pirouetted like a ballerina in front of the entire audience. All the same, the act receives a standing ovation from the audience and Presto jumps in joy both at the applause and the fact that he is alive. Alec takes this as a sign that nothing has changed in Presto's regard for him and starts to storm off the stage. *Presto*, though, further differentiates itself in this moment from *Knick Knack* and *Lifted*. Presto, seeing Alec walk off, softens in face and body language. He whistles to get Alec's attention and then uses the little magic he possesses himself to reproduce the carrot. In a final use of the hats, Alec pops up in joy and eats the carrot, finally fulfilling his goal from the start of the film. After this Presto and Alec take their bows together and the film ends on a shot backstage of the new poster advertising both of them.

In the end, *Presto* is about the forming of a partnership. Presto began the film taking advantage of and ignoring his rabbit and by the end he has learned that working together as a team actually brings him more success than before. The fact that the film has a lesson differentiates it from *Knick Knack* and *Lifted*. In those films, it is all about the cleverness of the gag. In *Presto*, the gags are still clever, but do not take the place of relatable characters who develop a relationship rooted in emotional realism. *Knick Knack* and *Lifted* had relatively one-dimensional characters so that the misfortunes they experienced due to the comedy did not seem unjust. Presto strives for something more complex than that. Presto is a character who deserves abuse in the beginning, but changes over time and learns from his abuse. Meanwhile Alec's

hijinks are all motivated by fear or betrayal so the gags are emotionally motivated as opposed to being just tricks on an unsuspecting victim. There is a story-related purpose to them and that is what makes them different. If comedies are Pixar's refuge for unlikable characters, *Presto* proves that those characters do not have to be simple.

Pixar's comedies all participate in and provide their own twist on a long-standing tradition of animation. In the end, however, these artists are not the nine old men of the Disney studio or the Chuck Joneses of Warner Brothers. They are a different studio with artists who have different talents and goals. They use films like *Knick Knack* to master the skills from traditional animation and use *Lifted* and *Presto* to figure out what they can do differently with such a tradition. These differences lie mostly in the development of characters, their relationships, and viewer empathy. Comedy adds joy and a light-hearted air to Pixar shorts, but these final three elements will become the primary goals of Pixar's shorts with "heart" and the short sequences within the features Pixar is best known for.

“When Somebody Loved Me”<sup>75</sup>: Pixar Shorts with Heart

A film with “heart” is difficult to define. In many ways it refers to a feeling as opposed to a concrete concept. In the Pixar universe, a film has heart when it taps into a strong human emotion like happiness, sadness, or love and portrays it in a way that evokes a visceral response from the audience. It is in these moments, whether in a short or a feature, that the meaning of the movie is captured. These moments engage with us on a deeper level, causing a genuine feeling within us, and, teach us a life lesson using the emotions generated. In the Pixar universe every creature is capable of giving love and deserving of receiving love. The films with heart work to tell their stories and show how they learn to love themselves and those around them. The characters’ inherent goodness means that when things good or bad happen to them, we care more. The challenge for the short film is to achieve this level of attachment in less than five minutes.

The films *Boundin’* (2003), *Partly Cloudy* (2009), and *La Luna* (2012) contain three different methods of teaching these “good” lessons. *Boundin’* is an introductory example that shows off the basic methods of moralistic storytelling, but has a key flaw that exposes the strength of a narrative choice present in most other Pixar films. *Partly Cloudy* and *La Luna* are both more sophisticated. *Partly Cloudy* achieves its emotional goals through masterful character development. *La Luna* achieves something similar, but by using an awe-inspiring setting instead.

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<sup>75</sup> *Toy Story 2*. Dir. John Lasseter, Ash Brannon, Lee Unkrich. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack. Pixar Animation Studios, 1999.

“When somebody loved me” is the first line of Jessie’s song in *Toy Story 2*. This montage chronicling Jessie the cowgirl doll’s abandonment is considered to be one of Pixar’s saddest moments, yet also one of its most beautiful.

The most overt example of the teaching aspect of Pixar's "heart" films is the 2003 film *Boundin'*, which was released in front of *The Incredibles*. In the film, a popular dancing lamb has to learn to keep going after he gets shaved against his will. His new baldness causes him to lose his claim to fame and the respect of his friends. He is helped along with the advice of a wise old jackalope who advises get rid of the "pink kink in his think" by learning to "bound, bound, bound and rebound." These quotes are evidence to the fact that *Boundin'* is the only Pixar short film (so far<sup>76</sup>) to include dialogue. The entire film is set to a song delivered by Bud Luckey, who also wrote and directed the piece. While this song makes the message of the film clear, it ends up telling the story more than the visuals or the actions of the characters do. By comparing it to the other films without dialogue, it becomes evident the advantages of silent filmmaking lie in the fact that we get to experience these character's life lessons along with them and we internalize such lessons due to the emotions we experience while watching. Despite what the lyrics give to the film in terms of clarity and cleverness, they detract from its emotional resonance.

The first act of *Boundin'* is an introduction to the world that the lamb will lose. It is a world of joy and energy that come across visually as well as sonically. In this part of the film, the narration is almost an incidental, complimenting the image and enforcing the positive emotions of the film with rhyme.

The initial shot shows off the moving camera that was introduced in *Red's Dream*. It follows some dancing fish up to a rock with the main character, the lamb, waiting upon it. Along the way, it introduces the audience to the western plane that

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<sup>76</sup> The 2015 film, *Lava*, will also be set to a song with lyrics. As of publication, it has yet to be released.

the story will take place on. Just like in *Red's Dream*, it takes advantage of the 3D to move fluidly and create a “realistic” world inspired by Montana, where Lucky grew up.<sup>77</sup> The team links it to the story by using the dancing fish in the stream as the incentive for the movement. The world is established as a setting as opposed to a technical display. The moving camera is omnipresent for the rest of the film, even in shots that could easily be static. It adds energy to the frame, compliments the music, and builds to the final climax. In the beginning, it is an introduction to a world, a style, and a tone.

The camera settles on the lamb waiting on the rock. While not quite breaking the fourth wall, the lamb seems almost aware of the camera and narration and therefore begins to put on a show as soon as the camera reaches him. It fits his character that this rock is a stage and it gives the animators a chance to show off their character animation. The most complicated character so far is the lamb, who shows off his pretentiousness with cocky body language and stuck up facial characteristics. Faces are far more influential in this short than in the others, with big expressive eyes like in the early Disney shorts and simple dance moves doing most of the communicating for the smaller animals. As the main protagonists, the lamb and later the jackalope are slight exceptions. They will get more complicated movements to show off their personality and inner life to compliment their expressive faces. Meanwhile, the smaller animals are literally recycled character models from old

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<sup>77</sup> Paik, Pg. 252.

movies.<sup>78</sup> Ideally, the audience will not notice the recycled characters. If they do notice, however, and the way they are treated in the commentary, is that these characters function like the *Luxo* ball and *Andre* clock mentioned in the first chapter. The characters link the film to previous Pixar productions and by doing so reinforce the Pixar brand. In the film, however, they are the lamb's back-up dancers and the characters dance in tune with the music to show off their joy. They dance in response to the lamb, physically representing the way they look up to him. In the end, this opening sequences sets up the community as a paradise for the lamb, where he dances and all his friends follow.

During this act, Luckey narrates the story as it unfolds. He tells the audience the film is about "life and its changes"<sup>79</sup> before it is proven through the story. Instead of the audience figuring this out later, they will be on the look out as the story progresses. He also tells the audience about the lamb's confidence and preening and how much the animals enjoy dancing with him. It is a narrative short cut since the narration is telling as opposed to showing. In this particular segment it does not change much because the images are reinforcing Luckey's narration, but later it will replace the more expressive animation.

The second act is the most expressive act of the film and it is the only act when the narration is absent. A disembodied hand arrives out of nowhere to grab the

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<sup>78</sup> Luckey, Bud. Audio Commentary, *Boundin'*. Dir. Bud Luckey, Roger Gould. Perf. Bud Luckey. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>79</sup> *Boundin'*. Dir. Bud Luckey, Roger Gould. Perf. Bud Luckey. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

lamb and take him away. The camera lingers on the empty space and the lighting turns to darkness as a thunderstorm rolls in. Meanwhile we hear an off-screen razor and the harmonica slows down. The change in the music matches the change in tone. This is not the singsong, rhyming world of before. The paradise has been lost with the rain and the audience is left to imagine the shaving of the lamb. When the lamb gets thrown back, he lands in a puddle, which is an action that comically reflects his mood. All that gave him joy: his coat and his friends are gone. By changing the atmosphere along with the story, the conflicts pack more of an emotional punch. The audience is immersed in a world of sadness along with experiencing sad events, so they are more likely to feel the emotion and empathize with the lamb. Meanwhile the animators change the lamb's physicality along with his new hair cut. Now he is gangly and awkward as opposed to proud and confident. He looks more vulnerable so when his friends start laughing at him and it is easy to understand why they find him amusing. If he was pretentious before, he is pathetic now and we are left to experience the repercussions of a darker world with him.

As the lamb huddles underneath the rock submitting to his former friends' mockery, a jackalope enters, signaling the third act. He literally brings light back into the frame and the music picks up again as he arrives. It is *Boundin*'s equivalent of Junior's return in *Luxo Jr.* It is also when the narration kicks back in. After the atmospheric shift, however, the third act is problematic in terms of emotional resonance. This is because it is mainly a scene comprised entirely of dialogue. The jackalope and the lamb sit and have a conversation that rhymes for the song, but otherwise is a normal back and forth with no distinctive visual enforcement. This is a

complete break in the Pixar short style because every film up until this point has been told entirely in visuals without even a line of dialogue. This is also the moment the conflict is resolved for the lamb. The jackalope gives him a pep talk and that is what gets him to be comfortable in his own skin again. He does not have to do anything except listen. Every lesson in a Pixar film before this has been learned by a character doing something. This was a lesson learned by a character talking.

After this moment the film shifts back into a more Pixar-like style. The song continues, but the dance turns into a carousel shot that shows off the entire world that changes with the seasons. This is another shot impossible for hand-drawn animation and Luckey points to how the computer makes it easier in this shot and more effective to have natural elements like rain and snow.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, this actually does physicalize the jackalope's lesson for the lamb. He dances through the changes of life with the same confidence no matter what he looks like. Meanwhile as long as he dances, his fellow animals do as well. The jackalope has solved all his problems. That is why the film ends somewhat strangely with the line "In this world with ups and downs, so nice to know we have jackalopes around."<sup>81</sup> While not exactly a moral, it does sum up what the lamb learns in the film and that is the crux. The lamb would have learned nothing without the jackalope showing up out of nowhere and teaching him. In later films, characters will learn how to experience ups and downs themselves without any jackalope there to show them.

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<sup>80</sup> Luckey, Bud. Audio Commentary, *Boundin'*.

<sup>81</sup> Luckey, Bud. *Boundin'*.

The fault of the dialogue put aside, *Boundin'* is part of a category of Pixar films that includes some of their most effective and distinctive works. Its message is consistent with Pixar's positive ethos. "Rebounding" and continuing in the face of hardship is a theme that will continue on in both the features and shorts, as will the trope of the awkward underdog finding his or her confidence. What can be learned from *Boundin'* however is that the easy way of telling one of these stories is just as it sounds: telling it. It works to get the story across, but it does not require the same type of thought that goes into how to best express an emotion silently. It removes a limitation and by doing as such, requires less creativity in the plotting and visual spheres. While Luckey is a talented lyricist who understands the types of messages Pixar wants to send as well as how to meld tone and style, he is a different type of visual storyteller than the storytellers whose films will epitomize the Pixar brand. Pixar will "relearn" how to tell a story visually and apply it to heart wrenching material that will make us feel and think the way the director's intends instead of telling us how he or she wants us to feel with words. By doing so, we will feel the emotions ourselves. We will feel all the more connected to the characters on screen as we experience events with them as opposed to just watching them.

The best example of that relearned lesson and the centerpiece of Pixar's most heartfelt shorts is *Partly Cloudy*, whose basic objective is to figure out a universal language in which to say, "I love you."<sup>82</sup> In this film, the love is between two creatures, who are not tied by familial or romantic bonds, yet care for each other's

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<sup>82</sup> Sohn, Peter. Audio Commentary. *Partly Cloudy*. Dir. Peter Sohn. Perf. Tony Fucile, Lori Richardson. Pixar Animation Studios, 2009. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

emotional and physical well-being. It is a pure and basic love conceivable between any two beings with a heartbeat (or endowed with one by an animator). That utopic possibility places *Partly Cloudy* in the core of the Pixar heart. What *Partly Cloudy* best exemplifies are the stories about how creatures help each other survive a sometimes-cruel world through their love for each other.

The key to *Partly Cloudy* is emotional balance. The world it takes place in is adorable with a proliferation of pastel colors and baby animals. What makes *Partly Cloudy* remain relevant to the adult world, are the steps the filmmakers take to avoid being overly sentimental while maintaining an optimistic tone. We must reach the loving message at the center of it all organically and the animators must not preach to us. The happy ending must feel earned. A sickly sweet world has the potential to be dismissed by the audience as falsely optimistic and naïve. Any positive outcome out of it would seem automatic and emotionally unreal. The filmmakers tug this line carefully. While, there are no villains in *Partly Cloudy*, there are miscommunications and unfortunate job requirements. Everything that is saccharine is balanced with some physical humor. This covers the film's bases in both story content and tone. The resulting film allows us to indulge in the cuddlier side of our personalities without feeling pandered to.

At this point in the chronology, Pixar is at the top of their field in technology and the technical advancements purely serve the story. There is no struggle to work with a field in its infancy or too much pressure to show what the form can do. Instead, the technology advancements come in service of the emotional story arc of the film.

*Partly Cloudy* is only the second Pixar short film to be released in 3D and the first to accompany a Pixar feature (the first being *Tokyo Mater* (2009), released in front of *Bolt*, a Walt Disney Animation film).<sup>83</sup> Everything before this point had been released in 2D even if it was conceived in 3D. Now we can feel as if we are moving with the camera as it explores as opposed to simply watching it move on a flat surface. The dangerous potential of 3D is it becoming a gimmick as opposed to a new expressive tool for an art form. There is already the trope of things launching out at the audience to get them to flinch as if they are about to hit them. *Partly Cloudy* does not take the technology in such a direction. It takes advantage of 3D by flying. The audience is transported through the horizon with the camera as the world and the storks are introduced to them. While flying is another gimmick, the 3D effects are used to subtly add to the beauty instead of explicitly highlighting the fact that 3D is being used. In that way it continues the Pixar tradition of making the technology work for the art as opposed to allowing it to be a separate, demonstrative entity.

The film begins by depicting storks flying through the sky delivering baby animals to expectant mothers. This story element makes use of the basic human love of babies (like *Tin Toy* and *Luxo Jr.*) and the joy we all get at seeing something happy and cute. It is all one sweeping take and gives the audience time to revel in the various visual pleasures afforded to them. Everything in the shot is bright, beautiful, and happy. There is the aforementioned flying effect, along with a pastel color palette to go with the early morning setting. Colors will be an important storytelling element in *Partly Cloudy*: they will shift with the time of day and tone of the moment. The

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<sup>83</sup> “Tokyo Mater.” *Wikipedia*. April 9, 2015. Web.  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo\\_Mater](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo_Mater)>

score will also accompany these changes. The score was written by Michael Giacchino and works along with the color to establish a tone and atmosphere. At this point, the music is jaunty and upbeat to match the joy of the gifting of babies with sweeping string sections to match the flying of the storks. The score works to tell the story as much as the visuals and this section is Giacchino's grand introduction. Meanwhile, there are plenty of adorable animals to coo at as the scene progresses. Since it is only the first minute of the film, the film can afford to bask in its sweetness and it places the audience in a benign mindset rooted in the best in each of us. It sets up an audience prepared to love and care for the innocent, which will come into play after the main storyline gets introduced. The world *Partly Cloudy* takes place in is an innocent one and this opening shot establishes that setting.

This shot also attempts to answer the question as to where babies come from, but by using the classic fairy tale explanation instead of the not-kid friendly real one. It is partly inspired by the opening to Disney's *Dumbo* where storks deliver babies to animals as well.<sup>84</sup> Just like *Tin Toy* both films create an alternate reality that answers some of the unanswered questions of our reality. The Pixar twist to the stork myth is that the clouds make the babies, a detail unaddressed in *Dumbo*. Their introduction is delayed in order to keep the world's entrance dramatic and until the audience has had some time to enjoy their flight and enter the warm and fuzzy mindset. Then the stork (and the camera) flies through a cloud to reveal this other world, full of happy clouds making cute animal babies. This segment takes time to establish the rules of the world by showing how the clouds form the babies from clouds and inject them with

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<sup>84</sup> Sohn, Peter. Audio Commentary. *Partly Cloudy*.

lightening. Then the clouds bundle the babies up and the storks take them away. This shot also has the first brief comic interlude with one happy cloud making a football and a football helmet for a crying human baby. The helmet is way too big, and provides a momentary laugh. This is not the darker humor that will pervade the rest of the film, but it does establish that the film is in fact a comedy along with being a film with heart. What the audience does not know is that the filmmakers are planting the solution for the film's major conflict in this one brief moment. There is one question that has yet to be answered, however, and it is the question of who makes the animal babies that are not as cute.

The answer is the storm cloud who is one of the two protagonists. According to the film's commentary, this particular storm cloud is named Gus.<sup>85</sup> He is the cloud who makes the predatory animals babies since they cannot all be puppies and kittens. Fittingly, his introduction is the first cut in the film. The colors do not change, but the music gets quieter and slower when Gus is introduced. It is still happy music, but has mournful potential due to its change in speed. This is justified because Gus is physically separated from the happy clouds, living underneath them. Other than the music, the first indication that this is a sad arrangement for him is that he sighs sadly looking at the happy clouds before turning and working extra hard at his cloud baby. He is an outsider, doing his best to fit in. The happy clouds approach the baby making as a carefree activity because to them their world is perfect. Gus puts far more effort into what he is doing, as shown by his tongue sticking out. He has to work to achieve the same sort of perfection. Gus' purpose is revealed when he transforms his clouds

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<sup>85</sup> Sohn, Peter. Audio Commentary. *Partly Cloudy*.

into an alligator baby that bites his finger. This is when it is revealed to us that he is in charge of the dangerous animals. Gus does not react in anger though, instead he laughs and shakes his finger at the baby like a loving parent. This moment is key. Gus is a kind and gentle soul. He loves even the most unlovable. This harkens back to the idea that every creature is deserving of love. Gus understands the concept and when it is revealed that his own position of being loved is insecure, we will (hopefully) respond to him the way he responds to this alligator.

This introduction is immediately followed by the introduction of the stork protagonist, appropriately named Peck. There is a slight change in music here, giving Peck a theme. It still sounds like the previous score here and more importantly, his entrance speeds the music up a bit as Gus' mood is elevated. He brings energy and joy into the frame like Luxo and the jackalope, but in a subtler way. He is distinguished from the other storks by looking far more exhausted and his feathers are all ragged when he salutes Gus. Even in his condition, however, he greets Gus with a smile. Right away, the audience knows this stork is a trooper. Gus greets him with excitement and a big hug and Peck reciprocates the affection with a peck on the nose. This moment is an important detail because in less than ten seconds, the two protagonists' friendship is established. This is not a film of establishing a relationship, it is a film about maintaining a preexisting one. Therefore, the film uses this tender moment as a short cut to expressing the love between the two creatures. Ultimately, Gus may be isolated from the other clouds, but he has Peck, his coworker and most importantly, his friend. From the start it is apparent that Peck loves Gus enough to put up with the physical damage caused by transporting all the dangerous baby animals.

This scene establishes both the stakes and the substance of the conflict to come. Peck has an unavoidably painful job that tests his patience, but also has a friend in Gus who does not have a choice in the babies he creates. Seeing as Peck is Gus' only friend, he cannot quit without hurting him. This problem will only escalate as the film progresses.

At this point Peck is still enthusiastic and offers up his arms for the new baby. The storm cloud offers him the alligator, the music fades to the sparsest spattering of notes, and film has its first major physical comedy beat. The alligator bites Peck's head and will not let go. As Peck struggles, the alligator inflates with Peck's panicked breaths. Seeing as the film has been so sweet up until this point, the comedy is a tone shift. The filmmakers use the skills they learned in the comedies in order to make the sentiment more effective. The audience can laugh at something fairly dark and not be overwhelmed by the adorableness of everything else. It places conflict in the midst of paradise. This is also a moment where the Pixar team uses cartoon physics to their advantage. In real life, this would be a violent and tragic moment. Seeing as the audience knows this is not real, the margin of safety is established and it is a comedic moment instead. It is also an opportunity to put the conflict alluded to with the feathers on screen. Peck tries to withstand terrible pain and still appear positive; while Gus feels bad for the pain he has caused and tries to take care of Peck. It is an example of two good creatures trying hard to deal with a difficult situation.

As Peck flies away with the alligator baby, he ends the film's first act. The music briefly escalates as he flies away and then comes to a neat conclusion. The next cut has a color shift from warm pastels to the brighter blues of daylight. The day is

progressing and the tone is shifting with it. The edgier lighting will accompany an edgier sequence. The new music is similar to the score from before, but it is not as sweeping and there are more horns, giving it a slightly more mournful tone. Even still, it functions like the beautiful carpet referenced in relation to *Luxo Jr.*: it maintains the tone and keeps the focus on Gus and Peck.

This sequence begins with Gus working on a new baby. It is the second scene in what will become a pattern of interactions with Gus and Peck. Peck lands and he looks even more beat up from before. Not only are his feathers ragged, they fall out when he salutes. He is covered in bruises and has branches sticking out of him. Gus looks guilt-ridden, and pulls the branches out while trying to clean Peck up. Gus tries to mask his concern with positivity though. He presents the new cloud baby and Peck makes the smallest of flinches. These small touches show that the tension is rising. It turns out, however, that Peck was right to flinch. The new baby turns out to be a mountain goat that promptly rams Peck in the stomach. Peck tries to laugh off the pain, but the moment is immediately followed with Peck looking up at the happy cloud above them.

This is a turning point in the film because it is the first time an alternative is presented to Peck. When Peck looks up he sees the other stork is playing with a new puppy who is extremely cute. The other cloud presents the option to quit working for his friend and work delivering the decidedly less painful puppies. The Pixar team is careful how they present this alternative. First of all, the happy cloud is kind of pompous with poufy hair and his world is sickly sweet. He never stops laughing in a obnoxious manner and his play with the new babies is excessive. In this particular

instance, the puppy literally runs inside the cloud and comes out covered in fluff. This is a world that appeals to the stork, but not to the viewer. The cloud is now tinged with the idea of betrayal as well. When we saw the clouds and babies before, we were free to revel in how cute they were. Now we see them as an exclusive group of clouds that isolates clouds like Gus and threatens to take away his best friend. We are now invested in Gus and his relationship with Peck, so these clouds are now the enemy. The story takes advantage of this sympathy by immediately following Peck's glance with Gus looking insecure and hugging his new baby close. It is a moment that plays on our sympathy for Gus and displays the genuine love he has for the dangerous creations he brings to life. While Peck's glance introduces a complicated conflict, at this point in the film it is still just a glance after an awkward moment. No harm comes from it. Peck takes the bundle away, letting it head-butt him as he flies. The gauntlet has been thrown however and we now know what will happen if Peck gives up on this relationship.

There is one final scene in the sequence of dangerous animal babies. The music switches to accompany it, with more strings and a slightly different tune. This shift helps to maintain the scene's distance from the introduction. We have moved into a different emotional space. This time Gus creates a porcupine baby, which is an adorable menace with painful needles that Peck becomes aware of too late. The gag starts with Gus presenting Peck with what seems to be a fluffy looking sheep. It is an exciting moment, because it appears that Gus has finally figured out how to make a baby that will not hurt Peck. Briefly, it looks as if the pair has solved their own problem. Sadly, they are wrong and what follows is the comedic high point of the

film. The baby becomes a porcupine as Peck grabs it and the needles immediately pierce his wings. Peck reacts by immediately throwing the baby up and back and forth like a hot potato. While this is mostly played for laughs, it has one key subtle detail. Peck refuses to actually drop the baby porcupine. In fact, he feels immediately guilty when he throws the baby up, as evidenced by his panicked face the second he throws it, and goes to catch it even though it causes him more pain. It is a tragic scene behind the comedy of a tortured stork who actually cares. Peck shows love for his fellow creature and worries about its wellbeing even as its hurting him He is not the snowman from *Knick Knack* or Presto. When the same gags happen to a lovable character, our laughter is bittersweet. Meanwhile, Gus watches both Peck and the porcupine with concern. He still loves the porcupine even though it hurts Peck, which is evidenced by Gus giving it a soothing pet as soon as control is regained. This dramatic sequence of pain is the beginning of what will seem like the end. Both creatures are torn about the right thing to do in a bad situation. While the scene was comedic for us, it has consequences in the story world. Peck gingerly takes the porcupine away business as usual and the film transitions to dusk.

The final act of the film begins like another scene in the pattern. Peck lands and just like before, he is beat up, this time with porcupine needles sticking out of his head. The music is no longer strings, but maintains the same jaunty tone on the xylophone. Gus does not even pretend to be positive this time around and immediately responds with concern. There is a brief comedic moment when Peck's face distorts as the needles are pulled, but Peck has reached his breaking point and the levity is short-lived. Gus turns around to get the new baby and it is so obviously a

shark (another comedic moment) that the stork panics. It is the film's equivalent moment to the snow globe explosion in *Knick Knack*. It is the break in the pattern that changes everything. Giacchino inserts his own gag here, including panicked trills to accompany the shark. Peck responds by looking up to the obnoxiously happy cloud who at this point is just throwing out ducklings accompanied by the happy strings of the score. This is the moment that the audience and Gus have been dreading. Peck flies away and the string section sends him off with a long and slow, mournful, sweeping score. Peck flying away points to a limit on unconditional love. Even if we have been inspired by Gus and Peck's love for the unlovable up until this point, hope is lost when Peck flies away. It points to the idea that there are creatures just doomed to be alone and Gus seems to be one of them. It is an extremely dark and sad moment and the audience is left to mourn with Gus.

At this point in the film the perspective shifts exclusively to Gus. It is important that the audience does not get access to Peck because that would give away the ending. Instead, we get to experience Gus' sadness. It looks as if he has lost his only friend and we get a shot from Gus' perspective of the happy cloud putting his arm around Peck indicating that the loss is permanent. Peck has been accepted into the popular fold and Gus has no one left. This leads to the darkest moment of the film, both literally and figuratively. Since these are clouds, the filmmakers take the imaginative step forwards that the clouds' moods change the weather so the world shifts to darkness with Gus, as he gets briefly sad and then very angry. The score is panicked with rapid trills from the strings. Gus' tantrum turns into a thunderstorm and his emotions take over the frame much like the dark moment in *Boundin'*. This

moment is the closest to traditional villainy the film gets as Gus forgets himself and his love for all living things. In the process, Gus destroys the potential shark baby and starts shooting out lightning beneath him. It proves that even though he has a good heart, he is still a vulnerable, imperfect creature. Just as Peck has his breaking point, so does Gus. His violent reaction is concerning, but his anger is short lived and he is distracted by the happy cloud presenting Peck with a bundle. The real reason behind his anger, his heartbreak, comes through as he starts sobbing, which is translated as rain. Giacchino marks this change by cutting out the orchestra and just including piano. The moment's significance is twofold. There is a subtle moral lesson in that anger and violence are most often rooted in sadness and rejection. It is a lesson that comes across with no dialogue and rings true because there is an example provided as opposed to a lecture. It is a lesson meant to be mulled over and remembered when one experiences something similar. That is for later reflection, however, and in this moment we should just be upset for Gus about Peck leaving. In traditional Pixar fashion, the moment also provides an alternate explanation for an everyday event. In the end, rain is clouds crying. While the link of rain and sadness is fairly conventional, the story behind the particular iteration of the trope is so original and it fits so well in the story, it is a trope revitalized as opposed to simply reused.

This is ultimately a happy short despite all this sadness, and as to not break with tonal consistency, Gus' crying is immediately followed by the big twist of the film. Up until this point the filmmakers have been playing with audience expectations. We saw the potential of Peck abandoning Gus and yet hoped against it. There was no obvious solution and the situation seemed tragic as a whole. When Peck

flies away it is a confirmation of the worst fears we have come up with on our own via the hints by the filmmakers. What we do not realize is that the filmmakers are playing with our feelings. Unbeknownst to us, the filmmakers planted the solution to this seemingly insurmountable problem way back in the introduction. This is revealed to us when Peck flies back to Gus carrying the bundle the happy cloud gave him. He seems happy and serene, a marked contrast to the haggard appearance he had before. The piano switches back to strings, but the score is more intimate and less epic. Peck then reveals that his bundle contains the football gear from before and that he is ready and willing for the next potentially deadly animal. It is a sweet conclusion that is a relief for Gus and for us. Gus hugs Peck, and the score immediately switches back to the jauntiness from the morning. Keeping with the film, however, there is one last joke as the storm cloud hands the stork an electric eel, therefore defeating the purpose of the armor. This is a happy ending though so Peck laughs it off and the world returns to its peaceful status quo.

What works about this ending is that it is an earned happy ending. There is an escalated conflict with real, painful stakes that is resolved in a clever way. There is a lesson embedded in the conflict, but it is told to the audience through action as opposed to a lecture. The filmmakers chose to tell their story through carefully choreographed action as opposed to the easy, simplistic method of the song in *Boundin'*. It maintains a positive tone, yet provides enough comedic edge to it to avoid being sickly sweet. The director, Peter Sohn, claims in the commentary about the film that the film was inspired by his attempts to maintain a relationship with his

mother even though she spoke Korean and he spoke English.<sup>86</sup> According to Sohn, Peck is ultimately figuring out over the course of the film how to say I love you in a language both Peck and Gus can understand.<sup>87</sup> They are two creatures who care about each other who also happen to have significant obstacles in their way. They overcome these obstacles because both characters prize their relationship over anything else. In the end, love is at the center of this piece: deeply rooted in the hearts of the characters and, if all goes according to plan, deeply rooted in the hearts of the audience. It is a film that works to bring out the best in people and for that, it is one Pixar's masterpieces.

One result of Pixar's current short film production strategy is that they take open submissions for story ideas.<sup>88</sup> This leads to highly personal films closely tied to the directors who submitted the ideas, hence Montana native Bud Luckey's western parable and Peter Sohn's quest to communicate even when you don't speak the same language. The 2012 film *La Luna* is no different. Director Enrico Casarova is Italian and everything in the film, from the look, to the characters, even the music, is meant to invoke Italy. It is a return to fables for the Pixar team (*Boundin'* has a fable-like structure), which were more common in older animated shorts like Disney's *Silly Symphonies*. What makes *La Luna* different from those films and *Boundin'* though is that Casarova combines information from stories he heard in his childhood with his childhood experiences.<sup>89</sup> His touch on this film is far more apparent. The setting

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<sup>86</sup> Sohn, Peter. Audio Commentary, *Partly Cloudy*.

<sup>87</sup> Sohn, Peter. Audio Commentary, *Partly Cloudy*.

<sup>88</sup> Paik, Pg. 200.

<sup>89</sup> Claudia. "ScreenWEEK intervista in esclusiva Enrico Casarosa regista del corto Pixar dal sapore italiano: La Luna." *screenWeek*. 12 Oct. 2011. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

comes from those stories, but the interpersonal conflict comes from his life.<sup>90</sup> The world may be fantastical, but the lessons learned are very real. In that way, *La Luna* represents a middle ground between the simpler *Boundin'* and the more original *Partly Cloudy*. It is a deeply personal film, yet made by a director and animators who have learned from the Pixar canon. It is that wealth of shared experience that enables Pixar films to remain Pixar films even with different directors with different visions.

The middle ground approach in *La Luna* leads to a different approach to heart than *Partly Cloudy* and *Boundin'* using its simpler story to accentuate more elaborate visuals. What *Boundin'* did with song and *Partly Cloudy* did with action, *La Luna* does with image. Casarova claims that one of the film's central goals "is to transport [the audience] for five minutes to that sense of wonder and the joy and curiosity for things that feel just as children."<sup>91</sup> It amplifies the awe experienced in the flying sequence of *Partly Cloudy*. In order to achieve that goal, Casarova needs to create and depict a world worthy of that wonder, hence the magical fairy tale setting. He needs the audience to see that world through a child's eyes so it cannot be familiar to them. The emotion of this world comes through in patient, awe-inspiring shots meant to enamor the audience with their beauty at the same time as telling them a relatively simple, yet still touching story. Similarly to *Luxo Jr.*, *Luna* takes advantage of the familiar, preexisting familial relationships of Casarova's childhood to drive the narrative forward. The child has reason to visit the moon and the family tradition adds

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<<http://blog.screenweek.it/2011/10/screenweek-intervista-in-esclusiva-enrico-casarosa-regista-del-corto-pixar-dal-sapore-italiano-la-luna-143165.php>>

<sup>90</sup> Claudia. "ScreenWEEK intervista in esclusiva Enrico Casarosa regista del corto Pixar dal sapore italiano: La Luna."

<sup>91</sup> Claudia. "ScreenWEEK intervista in esclusiva Enrico Casarosa regista del corto Pixar dal sapore italiano: La Luna."

emotional depth to the journey. The way Casarova arranges this is by using the competition between a grandfather and a father he was familiar with in his own family. The grandson is stuck in the middle as the two men try and teach him the family trade. Rooting it in the familiar means time does not have to be spent building the relationships between the characters and the focus can be pulled to the look of the film. *La Luna*'s look is inspired by watercolors and is the film's main attraction. If the visuals were around to support the story in *Partly Cloudy*, the story in *La Luna* is there to support the visuals.

The plot of *La Luna* is about one young boy's first trip to the moon with his father and grandfather. He is part of the family who is charged with sweeping away stars from the moon. It is a fantastical concept yet it keeps with Pixar tradition by coming up with a more wondrous explanation for the lunar cycle. Once again, the Pixar team works to tell the story of an everyday occurrence in nature in an imaginative and creative way. The main conflict of the film is that both the father and the grandfather want to teach the boy in their specific methods of doing things, yet the competition leads to more squabbling than teaching. This is a gentle film, though, and the conflict is kept mostly to the background and mostly humorous. Part of the charm of the boy protagonist is that he is confident enough and rational enough to roll his eyes at his elders' fighting and figure out how to do things on his own. He learns from the conflict without participating in it. The two men end up teaching the boy an unexpected lesson through driving him away, which is how to express himself as an individual. The story, while simple, is still deep. It is not as layered as *Partly Cloudy*, but there are no short cuts taken and the characters learn every lesson by

doing something. No jackalope appears out of the blue to save the day. Instead, the hero proves himself.

This story is primarily a spine for the visuals of the film. In this sense, the film deviates from the Pixar path. The Pixar ethos is “story is king” and in this piece the look takes slight precedence to story. Since the story is so carefully crafted, the film can still be thought of as traditionally Pixar, but the filmmakers’ focus on aesthetic marks it as a variation of the Pixar style. The title translates to “The Moon” and film is just as much about the setting as it is about the little boy. The film’s action is interrupted and framed by wide shots of the expansive sea and sky. In fact, the first 30 seconds of the film contain no action, except the father rowing. It is set to another score by Michael Giacchino, and just as in *Partly Cloudy*, Giacchino matches the score to the moment. In the beginning, it is an Italian theme on acoustic guitar. Later, he will add strings and more instruments to suggest the wonder of the moon, but at the start he keeps it simple. The film begins in a close up of the boat moving past, and the next shots linger on the boat, showing it from different angles. Most striking is the third shot, a high angle with the boat moving vertically across the far left of a frame dominated by the massive ocean. Unlike *Partly Cloudy* these are not establishing shots rooted in introducing the world. That would take far less time, they have yet to reach the primary setting of the moon, and the characters have yet to interact with each other. Instead these shots introduce a pace and a tone. We are made to sit back and just admire the moving paintings on screen.

This continues even after the action starts. Shots purely meant for physical beauty with little or nothing to do with the forward momentum of the story alternate

with the action. In fact, at some points in the film, it is the visual that the action is built around. The most striking visual moment of the film, the moonrise, is technically part of the action because the characters sit and wait for it to happen. When it finally does, it is meant to be magnificent. This is when the strings are added to the music and the moon is huge and bright in the frame casting the boat into a silhouette. This is what really captures the difference between *La Luna* and *Partly Cloudy*. In *La Luna*, the environment is the star, not the characters. The moon literally overshadows them and the characters are physically small in comparison. There are no shots exclusively devoted to the pictorial beauty of the setting in *Partly Cloudy*, but they are omnipresent in *La Luna*.

In these moments the emotional reactions of the audience and the protagonist, the little boy, are integrated. Since he is getting introduced to this world along with us, he shares our curiosity and fresh admiration for the moon. The grandfather and the father are jaded, and treat their job as one done a thousand times before. They can ignore the big beautiful moon in their midst. In short, their eyes do not get as big and wide as the little boy's frequently do. By giving us multiple beautiful angles, the filmmakers attempt to illicit the same reaction as the little boy in us. The facial expressions in *La Luna* along with the older men's wild gestures are key to understanding their emotions. They are ways to communicate using body language as opposed to dialogue. As far as these characters seem from the snowman in *Knick Knack*, the same principles govern their appeal. Wide eyes give the boy as much personality as the snowman's mismatched charcoal bits or Alec's soft eyebrows.

With the wonder in place, the story becomes the story of the little boy's initiation. As his story begins, the audience learns that while this is not a film with dialogue like *Boundin'*, these characters do have access to gibberish to communicate. Casarova attributes the style to cartoonist Osvaldo Cavandoli claiming he "wanted the father and grandfather speak this incomprehensible language, meaningless but very emotional, with flavors a little 'Italian.'"<sup>92</sup> While Cavandoli is certainly Italian, Cavandoli's cartoons are simple line cartoons involved in comedic sight gags.<sup>93</sup> The gibberish makes sense in his absurdist world. So even with this justification for Casarova's choice, it is a bit more of a communication cop out than in Cavandoli's cartoons or the limited communication in *Partly Cloudy*. This world is not absurdist and these are people, not storks and clouds, so the lack of speech or nonsense speech stands out more. That being said, *Partly Cloudy*'s communication through physical action and grand gesture would not work well when the older generations begin fighting, so the filmmakers fall back on this simulated conversation instead. It is a difficult balance because the film needs to avoid the pitfalls of *Boundin'* where we get lectured to, but it must also honor how these characters would actually interact in this situation. They would not be silent. *Partly Cloudy* got out of it because it was not dealing with human characters so there is no expectation that the cloud and the stork even know how to speak. Both films strive for a more universal language and go at it from different directions.

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<sup>92</sup> Claudia. "ScreenWEEK intervista in esclusiva Enrico Casarosa regista del corto Pixar dal sapore italiano: La Luna."

<sup>93</sup> Cavandoli, Osvaldo. "La Linea 101." Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 2 Sept. 2006. Web. 5 Mar. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skb2gKR7rOk>>

What also sets this apart from *Boundin'* is that even if the gibberish gets closer to dialogue than *Partly Cloudy* ever did, the bigger messages are not dealt with linguistically (as opposed to the major moral of the film like *Boundin'*). They are instead dealt with using physical motifs and sight gags. The first action of the film is that the little boy is presented with a new hat in honor of his new job. The grandfather immediately corrects the boy after he has put the hat on, adjusting it to match the grandfather's style (out of the eyes). The father is not happy with this adjustment and immediately reaches over to pull the hat down, just like his. This leads to the first argument the boy is stuck in the middle of. It is a short one though, and is interrupted by the waiting for the moon. The same argument appears again however a few minutes later.

The second argument takes place on the moon and handled almost identically. A physical object is used to represent each party. This time the father and the grandfather are arguing over sweeping methods to teach the boy. As they shout gibberish at each other, the boy holds up their brooms to their faces. The grandfather's broom matches his beard. The father's broom matches his moustache. The boy is once again caught between two men stuck in their ways, but as he gets more confident the sillier this bickering seems. If the first time they argued he just looked warily at the moon confused, this time he laughs.

These rituals are all tied into the boy's rite of passage: he must strike a balance between learning from his father and grandfather and asserting his own identity. That first argument about the hat is more confusing for the boy because he is still in the learning phase of the film. This phase is physicalized in the scene

immediately following the fight. That scene is the waiting period for the moon, where everything stops, including the music. In the quiet of the moment, the boy imitates his father and grandfather. First, the father rubs his nose and the boy does the same. Then the grandfather cleans his ear and so does the boy. The boy has yet to find his own actions.

The boy breaks out of this mode of thinking through action. After the moon arrives, the father and the grandfather make the boy ascend the ladder first. While the boy has an initially surprised reaction at being chosen to go first, he determinedly does as he is told. After this, the film takes its time with his climb, allowing small moments of hesitation and fear to creep in. The boy continues to pause and look down as he climbs, even prompting the grandfather to urge him upwards. By physicalizing the boy's fears, the film raises the stakes for the boy. Since this was released in 3D, the height would feel even more exaggerated in the theater and elicit a fraction of the fear in the audience. The important thing about this shot is that it proves the little boy is not fearless, but he is willing to conquer his fears. This is his first challenge and the effort he puts into it provides enough tension that the moment he reaches the top of the ladder is a triumph for the boy. He has achieved something just by reaching the top.

After this initial challenge is overcome, the film transitions to the moon. This is done with an appropriately elaborate shot where the camera spins as the gravity from the moon takes over from the gravity of the Earth. The startled boy is pulled upside down from the ladder and then through space towards the moon. This is one of the punctuating visual shots used to introduce the magical world of the surface of the

moon and to give the shift in setting a dramatic and grand entrance. The camera and therefore the audience is changing worlds along with the boy. The film pauses along with the boy when he lands so he can look around at the glowing stars covering the moon's surface. Once again we are at the same emotional point as the little boy because this is our first time on the moon as well. The tour of the moon shows off that the moon is even more of a magical place than we initially thought where the stars glow and clink when touched. In relation to story, it adds value to the place that the family is appointed stewards of. The moon is beautiful and worth protecting. Now we believe it too.

When the older men arrive, there is a small detail included to differentiate them from the boy. They walk straight through the stars, not caring if they kick some aside, while the boy hops through them gently, still in awe of their beauty. This relates to Casarova's claim about the difference between seeing the world as children and seeing the world as adults. At this point we are seeing the world like the little boy, treasuring every star and not wanting to ruin it. It is a link between the camera's eye and the character's eye. The boy still respects the space for all its beauty, so the camera takes the time to appreciate that beauty.

It is after this that the older men argue about how best to sweep, which is interrupted by the grand climax of the film. Once again there is a link between action and visual, when a giant star falls from the sky onto the moon. The music cuts out for a second time and the men can only stare at the star's gigantic beauty. The scene cuts to the two older men having no idea how to get rid of it and struggling in the process. At this point the music comes back, with a slight change in theme. The story is now

centered on how to get rid of this star so they can clear the surface. Since the boy has proven himself by climbing the ladder and is familiar with this new world, he can step up with his own idea and solve the problem. Once again, the most valuable elements are in the details, and right before the boy approaches the star to hammer it into a thousand pieces, he reverses his hat. In a throwback to the first argument of the film, the boy decides to take neither side and instead create his own style. This is not like the epiphany in *Boundin'* where some jackelope tells him to figure it out himself. He just does it and he does not tell us how he does it, he shows us, by flipping his hat.

The result of his ingenuity is yet another moment for visual splendor, as the film slows down and the boy falls along with the glowing stars to the music from before. The action is moving so slowly that the boy actually seems to be floating. While a visual treat, it also gives the father and the grandfather an emotional moment as they finally show more concern for the boy's welfare than for winning the fight for his admiration. It is a relief when he pops up from the pile of stars at the end of the fall and the older man's laughter begins the film's brief coda. The men all sweep the stars away together, using their own distinct styles. They end the film in the boat, staring at the now crescent moon, with the same wonder as the little boy started the film with. It is Casarova's goal visualized on screen and ideally the audience comes away carrying the same emotion as well.

The short films with heart are lessons in emotional sophistication for Pixar. *Boundin'* is an introduction to the concept of a film with a life lesson it is trying explicitly to impart. Its final montage (especially when compared to its narration) teaches the importance of communicating that lesson with action and its dark moment

is an application of the expressive filmmaking introduced in *Red's Dream*. *Partly Cloudy* is a lesson in emotional balance, with effective comedy balancing out the sweet and optimistic core of the film. It is the reversal of *Presto* in that it uses comedy to balance out its sentiment while *Presto* used sentiment to validate its comedy. *Partly Cloudy* also has the most ambitious emotional goals of the three films and its achievements most closely match what is commonly praised in the features. *La Luna* is similar to *Partly Cloudy*, but more fully explores the potential of sentiment in visuals as opposed to story structure. Its characters are more generic, but its painting-like backdrops inspire emotions in their own right.

Since the comedies were participating in a more solid tradition of animation, these shorts are more unique. While Disney played with the idea of sentimental shorts in his *Silly Symphonies* series, shorts with intense feeling and character development are far less common than cartoons. Films with this amount of emotional complexity are usually feature length. That is why these shorts are so important to the Pixar legacy. They prove that with the right amount of care and by picking the right narrative strategies in a short film, you can create stories and communicate messages that are just as deep as in a feature.

A Mysterious New Reality: *Day and Night* and *Blue Umbrella*

In 1986, the artists at Pixar took a leap with a new form and since that time have created the technology that supports that form. Since they have become an established studio and the medium moved out of its infancy, they have not had to take as many leaps per film. Instead, they have paid attention to story and figured out the best ways to invoke feeling. With no medium to reinvent, the technological advances have become smaller steps forward to make the films look and function better as they tell stories. There are two exceptions to this trend, however: 2010's *Day and Night* and 2012's *The Blue Umbrella*. Both films approach animation from a new artistic angle while still prioritizing story. In that way they represent the future of the medium. Not only are they taking old concepts and revitalizing them, they are proving that Pixar has not relegated experimentation to the past. While it would be presumptuous to claim that every film in the future will look like one of these two films, they are examples of new paths for the medium and the studio to take.

In Dr. Wayne Dyer's speech at the end of *Day and Night*, he condemns those who are afraid of something just because it is "new" and claims, "the most beautiful things in life are the most mysterious."<sup>94</sup> His are the only words spoken in *Day and Night*. Their appropriateness extends beyond the content of the film into both the film's and *The Blue Umbrella*'s historical context and how to approach each film's analysis. In a throwback to Pixar's SIGGRAPH days, *Day and Night* is a film whose goal is just as much about showing off its new technology as it is telling a strong

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<sup>94</sup> *Day and Night*. Dir. Teddy Newton. Perf. Wayne Dyer. Pixar Animation Studios, 2010.

story. Pixar layout artist Sandra Karpman says the film is essentially “three movies at once,” with both 3D and hand drawn elements, and designed to be shown in stereo.<sup>95</sup> These films include a black background, two cartoonish anthropomorphic blobs that move around that black background, and their insides, which are standard three dimensional animated worlds: one that takes place in the day and one that takes place at night. Just as each blob ends up approaching new worlds in their encounters with each other, so did the *Day and Night* team as they approached crafting *Day and Night*.

*Day and Night* begins in the world of the ordinary. It is the 3D rendering of a farm. The rooster crows, which signals the morning, and a rapid track back shows off the many dimensions of this idyllic setting. It is a cliché right down to the “morning music,” which can be found in film as far back as Walt Disney’s *Flowers and Trees*.<sup>96</sup> The track back ends with the first introduction of the unusual: the sleeping 2D blob figure of “Day.” The twist is that this world exists inside of him. As he wakes up and begins to move, he serves as a sort of filter on a black background, revealing more of the world as he moves, with his body serving as the boundaries. It is as if “Tin Toy” was set inside a transparent cartoon, all in front of Luxo’s black background. This is also similar to the classic Friz Freling *Pink Panther* cartoons that used simple

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<sup>95</sup>Karpman, Sandra. Audio Commentary, *Day and Night*. Dir. Teddy Newton. Perf. Wayne Dyer. Pixar Animation Studios, 2010. *Pixar Short Films Collection: Volume 1*. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007. DVD.

<sup>96</sup>*Flowers and Trees*. Dir. Burt Gillett. Walt Disney Productions, 1932. *Silly Symphonies*. Walt Disney Productions, 1929-1939. Series. DVD.

backgrounds that were usually just one block color to emphasize their exaggerated characters' physical natures.<sup>97</sup>

The first step director Teddy Newton takes to engage the audience beyond the technology is comedy. There is a series of visual and auditory gags as Day goes through his morning routine including a cow noise as he yawns and relieving himself via waterfall. These gags are here to make the audience laugh and the continued use of comedy will prevent *Day and Night* from becoming an overwhelmingly intellectual experience. Since in many ways it is deep exploration of how to approach life, it is important that the approach remains entertaining. This sequence also introduces us to the link between Day and his internal world. It lets us adjust to this strange, layered structure of animation. His mood and actions are reflected by the natural elements in the world inside him. It is similar to the clouds in *Partly Cloudy* where the entire world takes on life and emotions. When Day is happy, the sun shines and the birds sing; when things go south the clouds appear. In this section of the film, however, his mood stays positive and his routine continues uninterrupted. This is all reinforced as the morning music switches to another of Michael Giacchino's jaunty scores that maintains the momentum of the short in between sound effects. Now that the content has become original, the score can be as well.

With the efficiency reminiscent of the shorts before it, this introduction lasts about a minute. What is atypical is that this is all one shot and the fact that it cuts after a minute is almost invisible. It adds fluidity to the short and makes the black

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<sup>97</sup> "Pink Blueprint/Bomb Voyage/Pink Tail Fly." *The Pink Panther Show*. Created by David H. DePatie and Friz Freleng. Perf. Paul Frees, Rich Little, Dave Barry. NBC, 1969. *Amazon Instant Video*. Web.

background seem to go on ad infinitum. There is no end or barriers to the world these blobs inhabit. It is its own reality with no apparent fictional boundaries. The blobs live in their own dimension. This draws attention to a strategy that Doug Sweetland refers to as distinctively “Pixar” in his commentary about *Presto*: the continuous use of time and space.<sup>98</sup> Sweetland compares it the wild jumping around that older cartoons did and believes that because Pixar shorts occur in “real” time they feel more complete.<sup>99</sup> Each of the Pixar films examined before this has maintained this continuous time and space and when they covered expanses of time longer than their allotted number of minutes, the transitions were smooth and visual. This strategy helps keep the focus on one moment in time and the emotional power of said moment. It leads to clarity and patience with enough time for the emotions to sink in. *Day and Night* provides an example of this emotional power. There is no break in the action in *Day and Night* so the emotional reactions of the characters happen right before our eyes.

This style is maintained throughout the film and there are only ten shots in the entire short, even though it is five and a half minutes long. This editing pattern is similar to the stage-like editing of *Luxo Jr.* before it, but this time the choice is not one of technical necessity. Its function instead is world building. While the blobs’ inside worlds are familiar to us the world they exist in is entirely the conception of the artists. The world is unveiled to the audience as either Day or Night moves through it and while the insides of Day and Night change, the black background establishes a singular space for them to move through. This gives the short a flow and assigns

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<sup>98</sup> Sweetland, Doug. Audio Commentary. *Presto*.

<sup>99</sup> Sweetland, Doug. Audio Commentary. *Presto*.

importance to the setting as well as the characters. Meanwhile, there are no cuts to disorient us. This choreographed opening shot introduces us to this style.

The first cut occurs to introduce the audience to the second character, Night, but before that cut happens Day walks past Night without noticing him. This walk by functions to do more than show off Day's obliviousness. In addition, it displays an important technical effect and story detail: when Day walks by, the world inside of Night changes. The fence that had sheep jumping over it in the moonlight turns to a fence in an empty field in sunlight. It is the same spot, just in the daylight as opposed to nighttime. It is the same world, just a different perspective. What the blobs represent are different ways at looking at the world. This will be the basis for all the conflict in the film and the eventual philosophical conclusion. This walk-by hints at what is to come.

After the cut, the next 20 seconds are spent with Day examining the sleeping Night. He approaches Night with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. What is important is that as he looks at Night he keeps looking back at himself. This keeps in the forefront of the audience's mind the idea that these characters are foils for each other, not wholly separate entities. From now on, all definitions of character will be presented as two-sided. His confusion is also key because it will set up the future conflict as one of ignorance as opposed to pure malice. This set up is all done physically with no dialogue and very little sound. The sound script is still significant however. At this point the jaunty music tied to Day has cut out and has been replaced by the crickets and sheep of Night's world. It is a mood shift and an indication that this is no longer Day's familiar world. His response to this unfamiliarity will slowly

escalate during this sequence from simple confusion to slight malice when he goes from looking, to poking, and finally to a swift kick. It physicalizes Day's coping with confusion and fear as aggression.

Night himself does not get much of an introduction beyond Day's observation of him. As soon as he wakes up, he is thrown into conflict with Day and this is emphasized with the second cut of the film. They circle each other and the soundtrack switches to a quiet mixture of day and night animal noises with crickets, bees, frogs, and birds. This circling is both a sign of wariness and a classic battle formation. They stop with the moon and the sun in the center of each of them just to emphasize further who they are. They communicate via animal noises and have a conversation about how different they are, just without any words and with many noises and gestures of disgust. It is similar to the type of communication *La Luna* will use later on, but as these are blobs instead of humans so their noises and gestures are their only language. It is not masking dialogue; this is actually how these characters communicate. Day tries to end it here by walking away. The score from earlier begins again, but the conflict is not over with and Night storms over. As he knocks Day over, the score abruptly cuts out again. This sets up a relationship reminiscent of Alec and Presto in *Presto* with the difference being that these are new acquaintances instead of old ones. They will still exhibit however the competitive nature and aggression before realizing they work better as a team.

The next level of conflict between Day and Night is a competition to prove who is better. After Night catches up with Day he shows off his stars and complete with a train whistle on the soundtrack. It is a display that will be used again later, but

now Day just counters with a display of his sun. This is however dampened by clouds rolling over the sun within him and ruining his display. It shows how unpredictable this character's emotions are and how his lack of control is a source of humiliation for him. He is childlike in this way, lacking the maturity to control himself and caring way too much about besting Night. Night is not much better, laughing at him via duckling noises and furthering angering Day. This anger comes across as bees swarming. The relationship and characters developed in this sequence are very similar not only to *Presto* but to *Lifted* and *Knick Knack* as well. They are the immature and incompetent comedic protagonists so the violent sequences following this will feel safe to laugh at. What will make them different however is their growth within the film. By the end they will achieve an even deeper epiphany than *Presto*.

This is the most outright display of emotions inside of the two characters so far and this sequence is intricately tied to form. The filmmakers are able to restrict their noises to sound effects and score while still giving the characters an opportunity to interact with all their worlds. While we learn a lot about whom these blobs are, we learn it all through action and pictures. We also learn that while the worlds exist within them, but as seen by the clouds, are not completely controlled by them. This sequence establishes rules that are followed consistently throughout the film. They are however introduced to the audience in stages so as to help us completely understand the varying technical complexities of the film.

Now that the real conflict has been introduced and Day's pride has been hurt, a full on cartoon fight breaks out. Day and Night wrestle and roll across the screen. Little time is spent on their emotional states at this point and their inside worlds are

mostly just used for sight gags. Most notably, Night's punches come across as a lumberjack's axe swings inside of Day. The lack of consequence or care for the character's physical or mental states mark this as more of a comedic short than a short with heart. What separates this from the comedic shorts, however, are the intellectual segments that surround this one fight. Rather than being a story structured around setting up gags, it is a story about these characters' personal journeys. Furthermore, rather than including this sequence just to be clever or to make people laugh, the comedy functions to show off these characters immaturity. Their personalities are not just an excuse for the comedy like in the comedic shorts, instead the comedy gives the characters a place to build from.

The fight ends with a dramatic fall, which goes for beauty over a gag. The film moves on from the cartoony nature of the past minute or so, with the hang glider taking off inside of Day (a moment to capitalize on the 3D) and an aerial shot of the two characters falling into the ocean. The characters are still fighting, but the atmosphere takes precedence like *La Luna*. While *La Luna* was released after *Day and Night*, the similar shots reveal the animators' range and the potential for *La Luna* in the future. More importantly, it continues to show that *Day and Night* is a fusion piece. It includes different tones and styles without being taken over by them. Instead, the animators pick and choose a style to serve the particular moment. This particular pictorial element defines this part of the film much like it defines *La Luna* later on. The ocean is a more dramatic technical achievement than a farm and it's better able to steal the audience's attention. It also forces the characters to slow down and interact with their changing surroundings. It is a transition because after this brief altercation

in the water, the characters will stop fighting and start communicating about their worlds. Newton punctuates this by ending the time in the water with a speedboat “splashing” the audience in the face as the characters are washed up onto a beach. It is a signal that the fight is over, the two blobs have let loose their aggression, and it is now time to focus on sharing their differences as opposed to condemning each other for them.

The beach shot is the opener to the next chapter of the film. This is the learning chapter, but at first it is just a moment to breathe after all the chaos of the previous minute. There is quiet music coming from a radio next to a tanning girl inside of Day, but otherwise the characters just lie there until the girl sighs. This brings Night’s attention to the girl and for the first time, one of the pair sees something appealing in the other. Night does not fully understand yet and jumps in front of Day because he expects to have the girl inside him as well. It is a disappointment, however, because the beach is abandoned at night and the girl is replaced with left behind trash. Night’s desire for the girl fuels the new collaboration between the two of them. First he pulls Day back to see the girl again. Day catches on to his desires and shows him a pool party. Sadly, however, Night proves he has yet to find anything to offer Day yet because when he hops in front of the pool, it is closed up. This changes when he sees a butterfly inside of Day and the idea, marked by a light turning on in a shack, inspires him to show Day some fireflies. This back and forth all occurs in one shot, with Day and Night pulling each other all over the place. Rather than being just an amusing display of hormonal blobs, it is more about said blobs finding some common ground and beginning an exchange. It is a turning point

in the film where both Day and Night understand how they work and can begin to understand how the other works. It is a primer for the joyful climax of the film.

That climax is a montage of Day and Night showing each other what is great in both of them. It is underscored by very upbeat dance music that immediately increases the energy and the momentum of the film. The sights are meant to be exciting and dramatic and by Day and Night showing each other what is beautiful it gives a chance for the animators to show the audience what they find beautiful as well. It is emblematic of Pixar to celebrate the elements of our lives they find to be most fun and most exciting. This sequence is one of the most overt examples of their optimistic worldview. This optimism manifests in a series of spectacles. A rainbow shows off glittering colors. Planes show off the power of 3D. There is an even a clever homage to old Westerns at a drive in. Day and Night morph and change to show these sights off in the most appropriate way, usually taking on shapes themselves or leaping and gesturing in enthusiasm. The grand finale is the two different versions of Las Vegas that inspire the two to dance. This second wave of energy in the film is all celebration. They have internalized the message of the film even if they do not realize it yet. They are simply joyful and celebrate what is spectacular in each other with equal fervor as what they celebrate within themselves.

The last part of the film is the intellectual as opposed to emotional conclusion. As Night swings Day out, he realizes that Day's presence in front of the radio tower changes it to daytime talk radio as opposed to their dancing music. Day does not care, but Night listens to the speech alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. Dr. Dryer vocalizes what the two characters have learned about approaching the new and they

appreciate a moment of quiet appreciation. In the span of 4 ½ short minutes they have discovered, fought, learned, celebrate, and now understand, how to approach new perspectives on the world. Until Dr. Dryer, this was all done visually with support from sound effects and score. The shifting tone and visual styles were meant to keep the audience as engaged as the characters as they explored their complex world. It is the most overt example of how complex some the questions are that Pixar tackles in their short films and while these films are brief in length, they strive for bigger life lessons.

The film ends with a brief coda, as the pace slows down to keep up with the sun that is both setting and rising in each of the characters. It is their final surprise and the final test of their newfound knowledge, as they switch characters. Day gets to be Night and Night gets to be Day. Everything they were jealous of they get to now experience. The excitement is supported with unity as the two walk out arm in arm happy for each other and for both worlds they now get to inhabit.

*Day and Night* is a film worth studying and detailing because it is one of the most high concept films Pixar has ever done, including the features. It challenges Lasseter's balance of art and technology because its form threatens to distract from the story at times. Its intellectual thesis is its core, but it does use a story with the learning curve and shifting emotions learned in the previous shorts as the example that proves its thesis. These story elements elevate it beyond a display piece. Since it is a brand new piece of art, its request for the audience to be open to the new is essentially a request for the audience to be open to the film itself. By having the characters look literally beyond the surface of each other, it asks the audience to look

beyond its shiny surface as well. In doing so, it shows of its strong story backbone that supports the flashy and beautiful new technology behind it. Every little detail is a visual essay proving Dr. Dryer's thesis so *Day and Night* is an example of the films of Pixar attempting something separate from pure sentiment or comedy and instead attempting something intellectual. While this is a worthwhile endeavor, it is not necessarily an endeavor that leads to emotionally effective cinema. What *The Blue Umbrella* does is take this concept of engaging with the new, but instead does it in service of film as an entertainment medium.

*The Blue Umbrella* (2013) is Pixar's most distinctive technological undertaking since *Day and Night*. It attempts a controversial photorealism look where the animation looks so real it appears as live action. According to former Pixar animator Teddy Newton, it is a controversial method because in some people's eyes it removes the imaginative purpose behind animation in the first place.<sup>100</sup> The magic behind *Blue Umbrella*, however, is that it uses many of the strategies that have made Pixar successful in the past to make the photorealism work. By doing so, it proves that imagination is less rooted in look than content and how the most emotionally resonant fantasies are rooted in reality. It is the ultimate Pixar hybrid piece because it uses all the lessons Pixar have learned so far as a company of artists to prove a grander point about animation's status as a cinematic art form.

"Realism" has been a decisive concept in cinema from the very beginning of its history. Film critic V.F. Perkins explains how orthodox theorists felt that "film

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<sup>100</sup> Teddy Newton. Personal Interview. January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

cannot be art, for it does nothing but reproduce reality mechanically.”<sup>101</sup> The theorists had yet to understand the power the filmmaker has in choosing the reality he or she desires to reproduce. The theorists saw the filmmakers as technicians more than artists with no expressive power. Perkins goes on to quote film historian Paul Rotha who “venture[d] to predict that the film will be able to reach the heights of the other arts only when it frees itself from the bonds of photographic reproduction and becomes a pure work of man, namely, as animated cartoon or painting.”<sup>102</sup> Rotha’s statement puts *The Blue Umbrella* in a very unique position. Rotha did not anticipate what would happen when the completely man-made “animated cartoon” advanced far enough technologically to reproduce reality. He did, however, anticipate the problems Teddy Newton referred to almost half a century later. The critics of this photorealist method do not understand why a medium, where part of the appeal is that the entire world it presents comes from imagination of an artist, would opt to try and reproduce reality so closely. The theory Perkins provides to counter these doubts is that:

The movie offers two forms of magic [...] The first, on which the realist theory concentrates gives it the power to ‘possess’ the real world by capturing its appearance. The second, focus of the traditional aesthetic, permits the presentation of an ideal image, ordered by the film-maker’s will and imagination.<sup>103</sup>

While he was not referring specifically to animation, Perkins’ second form of magic exemplifies exactly what makes animation so special. It is that complete control that

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<sup>101</sup> Perkins, V.F. *Film as Film*. Da Capo Press, 1993. Print. Pg. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Perkins, Pg. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Perkins, Pg. 60.

the artist has and Rotha alludes to in his quote. What Perkins does, though, is show that “realism” does not mean the hand of the artist is missing. In fact, by using a realistic look to produce an environment familiar to the audience, the film makes it easier to believe in the parts of the image rooted in the “will and imagination.” Since the building blocks the animators are using are modeled after a real life city, when they start manipulating them to be magical it is more surprising, but ultimately more enchanting. The film viewer could go outside after the film and start seeing the faces that the filmmakers present to them and imagine them moving right behind their backs. What *The Blue Umbrella* really is, is the ideal view of the “real world” as seen through the imagination of the artists who created it.

For *The Blue Umbrella*, just like every Pixar film, the core is in the story. The story behind *The Blue Umbrella* is deceptively simple. It is, at its core, a classic Hollywood love story: boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, girl gets away, boy gets girl back. It is a story that is a convention, but a convention that serves the film’s tone and purpose. The filmmakers ultimately want to portray an idealized world that exists just beyond the notice of the general public. The plot of a romantic comedy is a fantasy occurring in an ideal world full of loopholes, coincidences, and magic that bring together the two lovers perfect for each other. The filmmakers have chosen a convention that traditionally uses what looks like reality to depict an inherently unrealistic story. What makes this strategy appealing is how much the audience wants a romantic comedy plot to be true. They want to believe in a world where lovers live happily ever after no matter what. It is no different with *The Blue Umbrella*. By buying into the fantasy and wishing it to be real, the audiences share in Pixar’s

inherently optimistic worldview. The animators have the power to manipulate reality and they use it to construct a world where love wins out and the community comes together to help one of their own. They imbibe their inanimate objects with the best of humanity and make us wish for it to be real. What makes *The Blue Umbrella* different from the many other Pixar films that strive to do the same, the animators behind *The Blue Umbrella* do not create a magical world separate from the audience's everyday reality, instead the filmmakers want to show off the potential magic intrinsic in our reality.

To make the clichéd notion of the boy meets girl plot more original, the filmmakers apply a twist quite familiar to the studio: the leads are anthropomorphized umbrellas. This choice is key in making the animation style work. It is an element of pure imagination that allows the rest of the film to look so real. It also reminds the audience that this is a Pixar film even if it looks like a live action film. It is a return to the look and concept behind *Luxo Jr.* Just as Lasseter started *Luxo* with a static shot of a realistic looking lamp and then brought it to life, *The Blue Umbrella* starts with *static* shots of a city and brings the entire city to life. It is an update and expansion of that basic concept, but the spirit is the same. The medium allows the filmmakers to make the familiar fantastical. Part of the charm of films like *Luxo Jr.* and *Toy Story* is that audiences could imagine their own objects coming to life behind their backs. Separating these newly animate objects from the human world was never the goal of filmmakers like John Lasseter. The life-like animation of *The Blue Umbrella* actually makes this leap even easier because the objects are not only coming to life they are

coming to life in a world that looks like ours. It is as if the film is bringing the magic into the real world as opposed to keeping it in a separate reality.

There is one way that the film differs from *Luxo*, however, that allows the rest of the film to work: the umbrellas have faces. Their faces are simply drawn and look more like a child's drawing than a real life face. They are the only elements in the film that are distinctly cartoonish and they add to the likability of the (assumed) male lead. Part of the reason the audience roots for the blue umbrella is his child-like optimism and innocence. This comes through in his wide-eyed, simple face. This face gives him the personality Thomas and Johnston explained in regards to cartoon faces. He has the expressive eyes and the simplicity of his face makes his emotions and reactions abundantly clear. While the rest of the world is obsessively detailed, the blue umbrella's face stands out as bold and clear. An umbrella does not have much to be manipulated in terms of body language and he must remain rigid to function so his face is his only means of communication with the world. This is why his face needs to be as expressive and easy to read as possible. The choice of the characters as umbrellas also serves a practical element for the plot. They are ultimately helpless characters in that they are at the mercy of the people carrying them. It means that it is difficult if not impossible for the characters to have agency. This plays on audience sympathies because we have to witness the characters struggle against near impossible odds. When the blue umbrella finally does try to act on his instincts, we root for his determination all the more. He is not taking the easy route and that makes him a hero.

Before the audience can experience the umbrella, however, they are introduced to the city, who is as important a character as the film's namesake. The first few shots of the film have no fantastical elements. They replicate the rush of a city with shots of people's feet walking quickly on sidewalks, cars moving past a traffic sign, and a mailbox. There is no music, just the sounds of the city and everything is lit with neutral daylight. This sequence was inspired by a project that director Saschka Unseld did before pitching the film when he went around San Francisco taking pictures of "faces" he saw in objects.<sup>104</sup> He imagined this hidden life of the city himself even before the film was made. It is fitting then that this sequence is the most "realistic" of the sequences since it was inspired by a real city. The shots are close enough that we can see the textured nature of the city and the various objects. It does not have the universal plastic sheen of other animated works. It takes advantage of Pixar's new light system called Global Illumination, which Unseld says "simulates what real light does" in that it "bounces off the surfaces; off the walls."<sup>105</sup> This light system is key for making the photorealism look work. As director of photography Jean-Claude Kalache explains, "the baseline is a naturalism that's based on the physics of light."<sup>106</sup> By replicating real physics, *The Blue Umbrella* takes a huge leap beyond cartoons of the past. They are doing what was literally impossible before to create a live action look while still not giving up their autonomy. With each object looking just as you would see it in natural light, it is that much easier to buy

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<sup>104</sup> Bishop, Bryan. "Director Saschka Unseld discusses Pixar, photorealism, and the making of 'The Blue Umbrella.'" *The Verge*, 24 Jun. 2013. Web. 31 March. 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Bishop, "Director Saschka Unseld discusses Pixar."

<sup>106</sup> Brandon, Russell. "Throwing shade: how Pixar changed the way light works for Monsters University." *The Verge*, 21 Jun. 2013. Web. 31 March. 2015.

that this film is “real.” This is not the only cinematic strategy in this sequence however. Each object that will be brought to life later is the static center of each shot. The focus remains on the object as the people move past. The feet move so quickly that you cannot focus on them, but things like post office box and the gutter stand still. The camera remains still in order to ground the audience and keep the focus on each object. It seems unusual to ask the audience to align with an inanimate object (even in a Pixar world), but that is what these shots are doing. By focusing on these objects instead of the people, the filmmakers begin to foster a relationship between the viewer and these objects. This will of course make more sense when they come to life.

That sequence is a quick introduction to this brand new look for Pixar. There are no twists: just “reality.” The filmmakers want to root us in the familiar at the same time as impressing us with their new ability mimic live action. What is being deliberately hidden from us, however, is the fact that the everyday objects in the center of each shot are about to become the background characters for this story.

After this introduction, the first minute and a half of the film is a montage of the entire city coming to life. The camera begins to move slightly in an attempt to mimic a documentary with a handheld style. Slight movements in the objects reveal that everything has a face from the gutter to the mailbox to the walk sign to the awnings. They are not faces like the umbrellas, however. They are made up of the various shapes within city objects and frequently the nuts and bolts that keep them together. We could go outside and see these faces if we really looked. They may not actually move, but the potential is there. Perkins says that “the most obviously

imaginative films, the ‘pure works of man’ –cartoons and fantasies—lean heavily upon the cinema’s realistic resources in order to make us see the impossible and believe the incredible.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, by using what is actually real, Unseld is laying the foundation for us to buy into his magical world and literally see the impossible life within these objects. What brings them to life is the rain. They look normal until the rain starts falling and then they start to move. They move within the boundaries of their functions as objects (the gutter lets loose water, the post office box’s mail slot opens, exc.), with the exception of their smiles. In order to smile, they bend their infrastructure. While this is similar to *Red’s Dream* in that it signals magic afoot, it is different mainly because of the soundtrack. Each time something bends that does not normally, there is a loud creaking sound to indicate effort. The objects are bending themselves with the same noises and exertion that would be required if a human was bending them. It is not effortless cartoon bending like Red. This is important in regards to establishing the rules of the film. These may be magically sentient beings, but they are bound by their structure much like a human is. They have to perform their function and if they attempt to do anything beyond that it takes extra effort. With all these rules established the focus shifts to the fact that the objects like the gutter and the awnings are especially excited about the rain as they open their mouths to catch the water. Each object smiles at the inclement weather and takes joy in the opportunity to come to life. Their enthusiasm is contagious and we revel in their joy as well.

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<sup>107</sup> Perkins, Pg. 64.

Their joy is in stark contrast to the apparent disregard of the humans walking through this world. We get no access to these people, so all we know is that they are walking quickly past this magic happening all around them. This is reinforced by the immediate unfolding of a sea of black umbrellas in response to the rain. They have the same cartoon faces as the blue umbrella, but they reflect what we think these people are feeling, which is neutral, almost grumpy indifference. It is also important to note that these umbrellas further hide the human's population's faces from us and block them from seeing the fantastical world around them. It yet another device to suggest that this world we think is magical is actually real and we just have not been looking. It is also a reminder to the audience that rain is usually a sad cliché as Pixar explored way back when they made *Red's Dream*. One of the more charming elements of this film, though, is that it does not take place in the grittier city of *Red's Dream*. This is a city that loves the rain rather than hides from it.

This emotional juxtaposition is set up for the introduction of the blue umbrella, who literally pops up out of the crowd of black umbrellas and dances above them, reveling in the weather. The blue umbrella is brighter and happier than the commuter umbrellas and the city of objects loves him for it. He moves past the objects we have seen brought to life, smiling at them about the rain. They smile back at him and throw water at him. Since he is umbrella, he loves this water. It is a happy community, and the community element will become key as soon as the conflict arises. For now though, the city, especially the blue umbrella, is joy incarnate and since it is so real looking, it leaves the possibility for the audience to imagine their world as having the potential to be equally cheerful even if they will never see it.

This sequence also introduces the audience to how music will be used in this short. In the beginning we hear only city sounds and then the steady patter of rain. The raindrops slowly take on a rhythm of their own that turns into the background track of music. Just like the faces came out of actual images of the city, the music comes out of actual noises in a city. Both elements become more magical and depart more from their realistic source as short continues, but for now what once again appears to be reality turns magical through the filmmaking. The world comes to life to this music. The film is tied together with this score and by sourcing the music in the rain, it feels more natural and the flourishes later on will feel more a part of things. The first of these flourishes will be the blue umbrella's theme. He gets a light and happy vocal track when he appears that is the main theme of the movie. Variations with the theme will occur with different mood changes just like in *Partly Cloudy*. In both these films the music tells as much of a story as the visuals do.

It is important that the community gets introduced before the blue umbrella's love interest because in many ways this film is more about the city than the love story. The love story gives motivation for the actions of the community, but ultimately it is the city that makes this film distinct. It also is its own form of audience proxy, reacting to the actions of the blue umbrella in the way the filmmakers visualize an ideal audience responding to the same actions. The filmmakers ensure this by intercutting all of the blue umbrella's scenes with reaction shots of the various city "creatures." Those creatures become our allies in the story and they can act on our shared emotions. Later on in the film, will panic when the blue umbrella helplessly get separated from the red umbrella in a dramatic sequence meant to raise our anxiety

as well. The difference is they act on that panic and work to save the blue umbrella. By including a community to empathize with beyond the blue umbrella, the film's underlying message has a wider implication. The love and compassion that defines the blue umbrella is seen everywhere. The character is not the only creature who is kind and idealistic, the world is as well. Meanwhile, that underlying goodness causes the creatures to work together and rally around the blue umbrella in order to save him.

With the larger message established, the love story gets introduced. The walk sign helpfully switches to "stop" and the blue umbrella's person comes to a stop right next to a red umbrella whose eyes are closed and is smiling, appreciating the rain as much as he is. At this point, color becomes key in the story (hence calling the film the Blue Umbrella) as color is what separates these two umbrellas from everything else along with their joy in the rain. They are the two brightly colored happy umbrellas in a sea of black and dark grey grumpy umbrellas. They stand out and playoff the traditional red and pink gender divide. They also match their owners, as is introduced with a shot of the blue umbrella's owner's blue boots in this scene, because their owners have the same color boots as their umbrellas. Part of the realism of the film comes from a dark color palette in the city and these bright primaries once again stand out as something different and a bit magical.

The scene where the blue umbrella and the red umbrella flirt for first time is an example of delicate silent filmmaking. The umbrellas may not have detailed faces, but they do have eyebrows and they flirt with their eyes. Visually, the world goes dark around them when the blue umbrella first sees the red umbrella. The darkness is subjective and shows that he admires her and is not paying attention to anything else.

The world has taken a backseat to this new interest. By pulling out the details from the background of the frame, the audience gets to appreciate her beauty as well. Meanwhile, the blue umbrella is shy and awkward, which adds to his innocent adolescent persona and is in adorable contrast to the joie-de-vivre he was showing off mere seconds earlier. It marks him as an underdog, and gives the film its heart. We want this umbrella to get past his obstacles both internal and external because he is a cheerful, nice umbrella who seems to deserve happiness especially since he shares so much joy with the world. Sadly, however, this scene also introduces how the outside world can be a hindrance to these two umbrellas. There is no antagonist in this film, just the threats of uncontrollable elements. When the two umbrellas finally make eye contact that does not embarrass either one of them, a truck rushes past and inverts the blue umbrella. Rooted in reality, that inversion is something real umbrellas do when there is too much wind. Within this world, however, it can be both an amusing erection joke and prove how this umbrella is at the mercy of the elements and the city around him. He is embarrassed by the apparent weakness in his structure and it gets in the way of his goals. What is special about this new perspective is that we can now imagine an umbrella actually having goals.

The inversion joke also foreshadows the imminent change in tone in the film. After a brief reunion in the crosswalk, initiated by the red umbrella looking back at the blue and with both umbrellas making eyes at each other and smiling, the two are separated as their owners go in different directions and ultimately get swallowed up in the wave of black umbrellas. If this were not a story being told from the umbrella's point-of-view, this parting of strangers would seem natural. Therefore, the animators

must use elements of the magical world they have already established to mark this as a catastrophe. First, we see the panicked face of the blue umbrella, which is to be expected and the noise of the rain starts to overpower the music. After that, the perspective shifts to inside the store in front of them. Since the store is closed, the entire event is now framed in darkness. This framing causes a shift in color and light that in turn causes a more ominous tone. We also get to see both umbrellas in this shot so we see both of them panic. Since the crosswalk reunion established the attraction as mutual, the stakes are even higher. It is not just a crush anymore, but a romance. Once inside the store, the camera tilts up to show the panicked face of the store, whose eyes are formed by the its window embellishments and are now quickly shifting back and forth. This reinforces the idea that the city is rooting for these two to be together and in turn the idea that the city is our proxy because after the cute flirtation scene we are rooting for the same thing. Lastly, at this point the music shifts from the jaunty beat and airy vocals to heavy strings cementing the change in tone from celebratory to disappointment.

The next section of the film proves how the world shifts to take on the mood of the protagonist, much like it did in *Partly Cloudy* and the shaving sequence of *Boundin'*. Perkins says, “we can value most the moments when narrative, concept and emotion are fused” and that “when such unity is achieved, observation, thought and feeling are integrated: film becomes the projection of a mental universe—a mind recorder.”<sup>108</sup> What Perkins is saying here is that the most effective film is justified within the cinematic universe on each of those three levels: narrative, concept and

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<sup>108</sup> Perkins, Pg. 133.

emotion. In this particular scene of *The Blue Umbrella* it fits the narrative because the storm would naturally escalate and the human would move towards the subway, it fits the concept because the realism increases the fear of the sequence and the actions of the humans who disregard the umbrellas, and emotionally it fits the panic of the blue umbrella. It avoids what Perkins explains as the two extremes: a movie “that contains too much material serving only to maintain its reality pays the penalty of slackness and dullness” and a movie that has “unattached decoration, emotion, or assertion: in vacuity, sentimentality or pretension.”<sup>109</sup> The sequence contains the emotional excitement so as not to be dull and the emotions are natural so as not too seem sentimental or pretentious. When the storm escalates after the two umbrellas are separated, the world becomes darker and more dangerous. The sparse light turns an unnatural yellow green and the wind increases. The wind increasing over the music is a signal that this is not the happy rhythmic raining from before. This is a storm and one any sensible human would want to escape from. Visually things change as the shot scales are closer so that the movement is more disorienting. Due to this change we also briefly see more of the human carrying the blue umbrella than we ever have before. We do not see his face, but we see entire body as opposed to just his feet. These are all natural changes because the magic of the previous minutes has been lost with the separation of the umbrellas and the world is back to its intimidating, unanimated self. As alluded to above, the human responds in the appropriate way for one not aware he is living in an animated film: he heads toward the subway. The greenish, yellow light makes this look hellish for the umbrella. This is a moment for

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<sup>109</sup> Perkins, Pg. 132.

the animators to take advantage of the new Global Illumination system. The yellow green light manages to touch and tint everything within its reach and everything it does not touch is black due to the storm. The world has conveniently become a nightmare as soon as the umbrellas have been separated. Once again, the filmmakers take something that is natural for humans and switch the perspective so that its expressive potential can be realized. For the human, it means shelter from the rain. For the umbrella, it means being closed up (a form of death) and the loss of his new love. With these high stakes, he exerts more agency than ever before trying to pull away from the human as the human tries to descend. This is a much harder task due to the wind increase and the forward momentum of the crowd of people. The harder challenge shows, however, that the umbrella has a strong reason to fight for himself and therefore he is going to really work to become an independent agent. He is willing to put himself in danger in order to find his love again. He wins out, breaking free of the human with the help a big gust of wind.

The wind is a clever way of keeping this somewhat in the realm of the possible in the eyes of the humans in the film. It is another subtle explanation for the magic like the black umbrellas hiding the human's view. This world has rules so that anything magical must have be hidden or explained by a natural phenomenon. As Perkins says, "In a fictional world where anything at all can happen, nothing can mean or matter."<sup>110</sup> This is not the dream world of *Red's Dream* where metal can be bent without consequence. One slip in the rules means that the potential for this version of the city to exist is lost. The humans in the film cannot know that the

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<sup>110</sup> Perkins, Pg. 121.

umbrellas are alive so that the imagination of the humans in the audience can stay active.

The next minute is a deceptive emotional beat. It is breath of fresh air after the chaos of the storm, but is also a false beat of relief. The umbrella flies through the air, and we get his perspective, the perspective of the buildings watching him, and we see him reflected in the wall of windows. The shots are mostly wide shots so we get to appreciate both the umbrella and his city. It is a *La Luna*-like moment of visual splendor as the umbrella floats along that also takes advantage of the fact that this film was originally screened in 3D. To add to the wonder, it is accompanied by a change in music to a more sweeping, graceful score. The atmosphere adjusts to the emotions of the blue umbrella just like the filmmakers practiced doing in *Red's Dream* and perfected in *Boundin'* and *Partly Cloudy*. Once again this lives up to the Perkins standard of "synthesis [...] where there is no distinction between [...] content and form."<sup>111</sup> This is the blue umbrella's great adventure so the way it is filmed and the music and the visuals are going to reflect that. The story justification for the moment is that the blue umbrella is searching the city for the red umbrella. He has abandoned all else and this is his only purpose. The justification is that this provides an emotional swell before a jarring and crushing deflation. As the blue umbrella spots the red umbrella, the music switches back to the romantic theme and it appears that a reunion is imminent. Sadly, however, a bus immediately drives him off course before he can get to her. After he is hit, the music goes silent and only the noises of the city remain. It is a shock for the blue umbrella and the audience, yet if it were that easy to

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<sup>111</sup> Perkins, Pg. 133.

get back to her, the film would not be worth watching. Instead, our hero needs to prove his love with a series of obstacles greater than simply breaking free from his owner. It exposes part of the power of this film, which is that it raises the stakes for a somewhat small and simple problem. Finding the girl he likes becomes a story of life and death where each obstacle is a catastrophe and getting her back is proof that the blue umbrella was worthy all along. Meanwhile, by setting the film in a city and providing those endless streams of black umbrellas, it gives the audience feeling that if he loses this umbrella now, he will never get her back.

With these stakes in place and the audience as emotionally involved as possible, the filmmakers can move on to the sequence they have building towards this whole time: the city objects using their powers to save the umbrella. This sequence engages on two levels. First, there is the sheer cleverness of each object using its basic function to help save the blue umbrella. It has the comedic structure of *Knick Knack*, *Lifted*, and *Presto* with a variety of solutions presented to solve one problem, but in this case there is no humor in failure and the success means so much more. Examples of these solutions include the turn signal blinking faster and faster to get a cab's attention before it hits the umbrella, the water gushing water at the umbrella to move it out of the way of the oncoming car, or the caution board flipping over to launch the umbrella out of the street. These objects have the same problem as the blue umbrella did in the beginning of the film, where they are only capable of doing what they are built to do so part of the appeal is them figuring out how to apply their ability to the situation. It relates back to Perkins' rules: "the rules provide a basis, not a

substitute, for skilled and exciting play.”<sup>112</sup> What he means here, is that by giving themselves the limitations that these creatures may only use their own basic functions to save the blue umbrella and that these moments of agency must still look mechanical to the people within the film, the filmmakers are forcing themselves to be more creative. There is no jackelope to run out and explain the problem and solution to the drivers and the people. Instead, the blue umbrella must be saved using the preexisting flow of the city. It means that these objects can only do so much to save the blue umbrella and that is part of the second level of engagement, which is the fear this sequence inspires. This is a terrifying sequence especially compared to other Pixar films. The cars rushing at the umbrella could mean certain death for him and the audience can relate because we would be just as vulnerable in the situation. The photorealism only makes it worse because these cars look real. There is no safety net of a cartoonish look that invokes cartoon physics and all the levels of protection those physics provide. Meanwhile, we are trapped in our seats and the objects are trapped by their own limitations so all we can do is sit and watch and hope for the best. Since this umbrella is such an innocent and had such benign intentions, it is hard not to cringe with each car.

The climax of the film is a similar bait and switch as *Partly Cloudy*. In one of Pixar’s darkest moments, the filmmakers give us the perspective of a truck driver as he hits the blue umbrella. The grate that had tried to launch steam at the umbrella to get him out of the way actually failed and sent him barreling into the truck. It is the

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<sup>112</sup> Perkins, Pg. 123.

worst-case scenario and the screen goes black. Based off of everything that has been presented to us (and our common sense), we assume the blue umbrella is dead.

The scene that the dark fades into looks like a more depressing version of the opening sequence. The rain has quieted, but the light has a greyish tone to it and the city noises have taken over again. It is reminiscent of the depressing return to reality in *Red's Dream*. This world appears to no longer be magical. We cannot see the umbrella's face and can only see his broken form. The level of detail the look allows incorporates dirt streaks and wrinkles to make the umbrella look completely vulnerable. This is actually the image that inspired the film: Unseld saw a broken umbrella in the street and wondered what happen to "him."<sup>113</sup> All of the blue umbrella's injuries are evidence of the drama that just unfolded and the sheer amount of effort the blue umbrella put into trying to get back to the red umbrella. He is a fallen hero, but a hero all the same. The grates and gutters are all still alive, but they are frowning now and pushing at the umbrella to see if he is ok, yet he is unresponsive. The community is in mourning along with the audience. This is, however, not *Red's Dream* so the umbrella is given a happy ending after all. First, the blue owner appears and picks up the umbrella. This is only a partial victory, though, because though we see Blue's face and know that he is indeed alive, but he looks as if he is in pain and still sad since he tried so hard and yet still failed. He is alive, but injured and still has not reached his goal. He earned his love yet was stopped by something completely out of his control.

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<sup>113</sup> Bishop, "Director Saschka Unseld discusses Pixar."

It is in this moment though that the filmmakers play with sound and color to fulfill hopes and invoke the magic of cinema. The rain that had been falling stops and a red tint appears on the blue umbrella. With these clues in mind, the blue umbrella looks up to see the red umbrella looking worried about him. It is a bit of a *deus ex umbrella*, but the audience has already been put through enough of an emotional rollercoaster that it feels like a relief as opposed to a cheat. Since we also know from the flying sequence that the red umbrella was close this whole time, it is not out of the realm of possibility that she witnessed his harrowing adventure. This is a thin explanation, but because we want this to happen, we accept it. It still feels earned simply because this community and this umbrella are so lovable and so determined that it feels as if they deserve a win. The blue umbrella even has the scars to prove he earned this. As Perkins says, “Regardless of the playfulness of a film, our drive is to hope for the most satisfying resolution that credibility allows.”<sup>114</sup> This also fits his theory of synthesis seeing as it makes sense narratively and it fulfills our emotional needs. Having the red umbrella come back is both satisfying and credible within this magical, positive world so we accept it. It also speaks the studio as a whole that they even attempted to make this plausible. Since anything is possible in this medium, the filmmakers could have tacked on an implausible happy ending like the antelope in *Boundin’* and it could have technically worked. The filmmakers want us to believe however and by including realistic plausible details it makes it easier to do so. By refusing to break the rules even in the service of a happy ending, they keep the possibility of this world being real open. It also exposes a level of care and

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<sup>114</sup> Perkins, Pg. 144.

consideration that is evident in every Pixar film. By keeping their films plausible, the emotions attached to them feel real and therefore the messages included in these films resonate more. This ultimate win is confirmed as the music starts up again with the jaunty score before and there is yet another smiling montage of the various city objects as they watch the humans go on a date with their umbrellas. The umbrella's final cuddle confirms that the blue umbrella got his wish and he will never be separated from the red umbrella ever again. His determination and our optimism have been rewarded. Fighting and hoping for the good has triumphed over even the most unexpected of hindrances.

With such a simple story, *The Blue Umbrella* is an emotional tour-de-force that uses every frame to increase the stakes and make the audience care. It takes advantage of previous Pixar strategies of creating likable underdog characters and imaginative landscapes in order to give the audience something to root for. Even though it has incredibly dark moments, it is an overwhelming positive film that sees the magic in mundane reality and envisions a loving infrastructure supporting our everyday lives. In the end, *The Blue Umbrella* is one of those “obviously imaginative films” that Perkins referred to.<sup>115</sup> It allows us to see the impossible in the most realistic of atmospheres and by doing so, partake in the optimism and victory of the good that believing in the incredible inspires. It is another embodiment of John Lasseter's quote: “Art challenges technology and technology inspires the art.”<sup>116</sup> In this case, the film took a technology that arguably threatened the medium and used it to exemplify what is best about the medium and what makes it an art.

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<sup>115</sup> Perkins, Pg. 64.

<sup>116</sup> Lasseter, John. *Short History*.

Both *Day and Night* and *The Blue Umbrella* are mediations on the animation format. *Day and Night* is more overt in its purpose, using the story to examine the importance of engaging with the “new” as it engages with the new itself. *The Blue Umbrella* stumbles upon its engagement with the intellectual by attempting a new look and in doing so, being forced to participate in a long-standing cinematic debate. While both films achieve what they set out to do, *The Blue Umbrella* is ultimately more emotionally engaging. This falls back to the old debate about showing as opposed to telling. In *Day and Night* we are told to engage with the new and the blobs are provided for us as examples. Their immature and slightly violent nature makes it hard to truly feel for them, but their story is interesting enough to engage us and the comedy is skillfully executed. *The Blue Umbrella*, by contrast, is entirely emotionally motivated. The filmmakers would rather we root for the protagonist than engage with an intellectual concept. Therefore we less time thinking and more time feeling. In the end, this film is about falling in love: with an umbrella, with a city, and with life itself. It is only able to communicate this by engaging with intelligent thought about film and film’s purpose. It uses the new technology not to engage with technology, but to say bigger things about the story.

Conclusion: A Four-Minute Love Story Better Than *Twilight*<sup>117</sup>

In 1986, life embodied in Pixar terms was a joyful, energetic lamp who loved his father and wanted to explore. In 2013, life to Pixar was a familiar city animated by the rain and committed to helping a joyful, energetic blue umbrella get the girl. 23 years and different creative teams separate these two films, yet their spirit and their values are the same. Founder of Studio Ghibli Hayao Miyazaki said that “[Pixar’s] style may change or its stories may change. But as long as it keeps its soul and heart, the studio will be able to survive.”<sup>118</sup> *Luxo Jr.* and *The Blue Umbrella* are two films that define Pixar’s heart and the fact that they are their oldest and their newest point to Pixar’s survival. It has survived because its leaders have fostered a culture that mentors new talent and passes along institutional knowledge so that each film continues to add to their ever-increasing learning portfolio. The shorts are time capsules and lessons. What works gets documented and what does not work gets fixed. They exhibit a mastery of both sentiment and comedy, which get fused in their features. There is an ongoing commitment to experimenting and testing the boundaries of the medium. Most importantly, they are condensed examples of Pixar’s commitment to excellence and optimistic worldview.

Perhaps the best evidence of the value of the short films to Pixar is when the short film strategies are utilized in the features that studio is known for. Pixar has

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<sup>117</sup> This refers to a popular internet “meme” that claims “Disney told a better love story in 8 minutes than Stephanie Mayer [author of the *Twilight* books] did in 4 books” superimposed on top of an image of Carl and Ellie from *Up* (wookie89, reddit). While this is more a silly jab at *Twilight* than anything else and the author got the timing wrong, it points to the popular reputation of “The Married Life” montage and the way that the public has latched onto Carl and Ellie’s love story along with the exact format in which it was presented.

<sup>118</sup> Paik, Pg. 294.

countless examples of these types of sequences in their features that emulate what has been learned in the shorts. For example, in *Toy Story 2* there is a montage set to music called “When She Loved Me” or more commonly, “Jessie’s Song.” The montage is three minutes long and tells the story of Jessie the cowgirl doll and her relationship with her owner Emily. Emily grows up as the sequence progresses: it starts with the joy of the two of them playing together, but ends with Emily abandoning Jessie when she outgrows her. It is a sequence free from dialogue. The lyrics of the song tell the story, but not in the oppressive way that the narration in *Boundin’* does. They fade to the background and the mournful score and the images take precedence. Meanwhile, the world’s lighting and mise-en-scene shift with mood and time as the spaces remain the same, but Emily changes. These cinematic strategies, present in all the short films, contribute to what is one of the most emotionally effective sequences Pixar has ever drafted. As actor Tom Hanks famously said about the first screening he saw of *Toy Story 2* “when ‘Jessie’s Song’ came up, [Tim Allen and him] were just 40-year-old men crying our eyes out over this abandoned cowgirl doll. It was a knee-breaker.”<sup>119</sup> “Jessie’s Song” started a trend of dialogue-free, heartwarming sequences in the features that behave like short films yet work to serve the purposes of a feature. The most moving of these sequences and the one most useful for this study is the “Married Life” montage that opens the 2009 film *Up*.

*Up* is one of Pixar’s most beloved features and one of the two (the other being *Toy Story 3*) that have been nominated for a Best Picture Oscar.<sup>120</sup> Its story, however, is unusual for an American animated feature. The film’s main protagonist is a grumpy

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<sup>119</sup> Paik, Pg. 154.

<sup>120</sup> See Appendix

old man named Carl who journeys to South America in a house that floats by way of thousands of rainbow balloons. The purpose driving such a journey is that Carl wants to honor the dream of his late wife Ellie. The film therefore begins with a montage that depicts their entire relationship. While this montage is roughly 4 minutes long, *Up* is famous for this montage. David Denby, film critic for *The New Yorker*, writes that “the marital sequence is one of the most moving animated episodes ever made”<sup>121</sup> and Manohla Dargis, film critic for *The New York Times*, writes that the sequence is “an adult relationship that the director Pete Docter brilliantly compresses into some four wordless minutes [...] [and] is filmmaking at its purest.”<sup>122</sup> These critics voice the public’s appreciation for the film, but also specifically for the film’s format. The silence and brevity are elements that are celebrated as opposed to being seen as limitations. They add to the film’s emotional resonance rather than detract. In many ways, “Married Life” is Pixar’s most beloved short film. It shares many elements with the short films and is celebrated for them. There are key differences in terms of framing within the narrative, however, so what “Married Life” ultimately shows is how the short form can best be adapted to fit the feature.

The biggest difference between “Married Life” and the shorts is the sequence’s context. The film introduces the two protagonists, Ellie and Carl, as children in a brief sequence of scenes preceding “Married Life” in which their personalities get sharply defined by dialogue and the way the children play. None of

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<sup>121</sup> Denby, David. “The Wanderers.” *The New Yorker*. 8 Jun. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/06/08/the-wanderers-2>>

<sup>122</sup> Dargis, Manohla. “From Pixar, the House That Soared.” *The New York Times*. 28 May. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/29/movies/29up.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/29/movies/29up.html?_r=0)>

the shorts had the luxury of being able to introduce their characters ahead of time. Meanwhile, the sequence is meant to be an introduction to the film as a whole. It ends sadly, but the rest of the film challenges that sadness. Standing alone it is not as complete as films like *Partly Cloudy* and *La Luna* because it has an unsatisfactory conclusion much like *Red's Dream*. Taken in context, however, and the film is “completed” later on when Carl learns how to move past his wife’s death by celebrating her life. The entire film ends up solving the conflict raised in the montage. It is truly an expansion of the short form.

While the context is important, however, the actual content of the short is evocative of the short films that preceded it and foreshadows some of the elements of the shorts that followed it. The opening of the sequence is the wedding of Carl and Ellie, which quickly reinforces the characterizations established by the introduction to the film. Carl is quiet, but happy and Ellie is literally bouncing with excitement. She is the one who kisses him and not the other way around. Much like Junior’s wiggle, this physicalizes her personality (they also share a youthful enthusiasm). Their families reflect the bride and groom much like the atmospheres of the shorts reflect the moods of their characters and the mise-en-scene of “Jessie’s Song” reflect the different stages of growing up for Emily. Ellie’s side fills the pews in colorful dress and yells exuberantly. Carl’s side is sparsely populated and dressed in blacks and greys. These quick shots are clear examples of purely visual storytelling. There is no dialogue to explain Carl and Ellie’s characters, yet their families tell their story. It communicates the same information about the two protagonists we learned when they were children, just in quicker, more efficient way.

The next few shots serve to introduce Ellie and Carl's house. Carl carries Ellie in her bridal gown to a dilapidated old place, and the next shot is Ellie, still dressed in her gown, sawing a board in half. Once again, this is characterization through action. Ellie is the type of woman who is excited to work on a project when she is still dressed up for her wedding. It is a small detail just like Tin Toy's plume that gives her personality. Meanwhile, this section establishes Carl and Ellie as a team. They work together to get this house up and running. Little things become symbols for their relationship: they push each other's chairs into place, Carl accidentally leaves a handprint on the mailbox, Ellie responds by purposefully leaving her own. The house itself becomes a manifestation of Ellie's dreams from when she was a little girl, as seen by a pan up from her childish drawing to the newly painted house (the house was also Ellie's clubhouse in the childhood sequence). For the film as a whole, these are the house and all its details are visual motifs that remind Carl of Ellie throughout his journey. This house is Ellie to him and he will have to let it go in order to move on. For the montage, however, it is Ellie and Carl building a life together and the audience gets to see it happen.

Two huge differences this montage has with many of the shorts discussed previously is that this montage stars humans and more importantly, there is nothing fantastical about this montage. While it is not photorealistic, like *The Blue Umbrella*, it is the most realistic in emotional content. The filmmakers therefore must balance its cartoon look with the occasional somberness of what is happening on screen. The character's personalities must come exclusively through their expressions and their actions and these cannot be too exaggerated like in *Presto*. The artists therefore

develop Carl and Ellie's personalities during in the building sequence and the picnic and zoo scenes that follow. She is high-spirited, but loving and he is hapless, but endlessly devoted. She smirks at him; he gazes at her. They balance each other out.

The picnic scene that follows the house building also plays with dialogue in a new way. Just like every short except for *Boundin'* and *Day and Night*, "Married Life" has no dialogue. In the picnic scene, Carl and Ellie's mouths move and they are definitely talking to each other. The remarkable thing is that we do not need to know what they are saying. First of all, we see the clouds they are watching through Carl and Ellie's eyes and they fade into the figures they are discussing so we know what they are thinking of. That strategy will become important later when this scene is repeated when the couple is thinking of children. For now, though, it makes little difference that the clouds shift because the point of the scene is to see the couple interacting and enjoying each other's company. Carl simply closes his eyes and smiles as his wife talks. There is more power in their expressions than their words and that has been the guiding principle all along when the studio chose to eliminate dialogue in their other shorts. The lack of dialogue in "Married Life" also brings the score into stark relief. This is another score from Michael Giacchino composed especially for this montage. He brings instruments in and out to shift the tone, but the theme remains. Unlike the shorts, this theme will be used to invoke Ellie later on in the feature, but for now it is used to invoke emotion and a particular nostalgic mood.

A small, but loving detail ends this particular section of the montage. The two sit reading, and without looking up, hold each other's hand. This is the one of the details much like Luxo's wiggle that physicalizes an emotion and is arguably

superfluous to the plot. It may not propel the action forward but is essential to the emotional understanding of the film just like the montage as a whole.

The next section of the film begins as if it is continuing like the bonding section. The couple is on another picnic, except instead of seeing animals in the clouds, they see babies. Sadly this is an emotional high that will be quickly shut down much like the blue umbrella's flight will be four years later. Carl and Ellie cheerfully paint a nursery as the music starts to slow down eventually becoming just piano. The camera tracks slowly right instead of making a cut and crosses a wall into a dark waiting room. The only light comes from an open doorway of a doctor's office with a diagram of a pregnant woman on the wall. Ellie sits in a chair framed by the door with her head in her hands. Carl stands behind her, hands on her shoulders and looking down. The only colors are greys and pale blues. Up until this point the entire film has been awash in bright pastels, specifically magenta, which the filmmakers admit is Ellie's color.<sup>123</sup> These colors have added to the bright and happy tone of the short and Ellie's joyful nature. By eliminating them, the art directors signal a dramatic change in the tone. Everything in this moment points to their happy dream being shattered.

While John Lasseter jokes that the end of *Red's Dream* is the studio's blue period, this scene has a better claim to being Pixar's saddest moment. While there is no question the content itself is tragic without any additions stylistically, the way the scene is presented pulls no punches emotionally. Due to the choice to track rather

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<sup>123</sup> Docter, Pete. Audio Commentary. *Up*. Dir. Pete Docter, Bob Peterson. Perf. Edward Asner, Jordon Nagai, John Ratzenberger. Pixar Animation Studios, 2009. DVD.

than cut, the doctor's office is presented literally side by side with the bright yellow nursery and Giacchino slows the music so abruptly that audience is given no preparation for the moment. While there was nothing magical about the montage before this moment, the intrusion of the tragic into Carl and Ellie's timeline makes their happiness seem at best too delicate to sustain and at worst as naïve a fantasy as inanimate objects coming to life. It is also an unexpected type of tragedy. While sad elements like the trope of a dead parent are common now in animated films thanks to films like *Bambi*, this may be the first time a miscarriage is handled in an animated film. The filmmakers take a risk with a very adult concept very early in the film. This risk proves that Pixar really does not think of their audience as exclusively children. Denby confirms this sentiment early on in his review of *Up* that "These movies are fashioned as much for adults as for kids."<sup>124</sup> Therefore, when they make a film about loss, they are going to delve as deeply as possible in order to make their viewer feel. There is a good chance that a child will not understand much about this scene other than it is sad, but for an adult it carries far more meaning.

It becomes easier to critique films like *Red's Dream* and *Boundin'* when you know that the studio responsible for it is also responsible for the scenes that follow when Ellie loses the baby. Just like *Partly Cloudy* can say so much just through actions and visuals, the rebounding scenes in the montage are delicately handled and communicate a very complex idea with silent and expressive filmmaking. Carl watches out the window with mournful eyes. While there is color back in the frame, shadows of trees dance across him. The next shot reveals from behind that he is

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<sup>124</sup> Denby. "The Wanderers."

watching Ellie who is sitting on a chair in the backyard in the sun. Her hair is let down for the first time in the montage. The music is still just a slow piano playing the same theme from before, just far more sparsely. A medium close up shows Ellie with her eyes closed, but her head tilted towards the sun, and her hair blowing just slightly in the wind. It is a beautiful meditative shot that is held for a few seconds as Carl walks over to her. He gently gets her attention and they share a very slight, sad smile. In the next shot, he puts her old adventure book into her lap. Both their faces light up, and then the film continues.

These brief shots have an incredible message behind them. First, they show a couple experiencing a pain beyond words. Before this moment, the montage has moved at a fast and cheerful clip during which Ellie rarely stopped moving. Now she sits and mourns. Carl meanwhile has been meek and somewhat incompetent up until this point, but now he gets a chance to bring joy back into Ellie's life just as she has brought joy into his. His answer is to return to her dreams from the past. Ellie's adventure book becomes more than a childhood memento and instead becomes the couple's new chance at happiness. It is a defining moment in their relationship that they can move beyond their image of a conventional family and also learn to recover from losing what they considered most important in their life. A powerful idea on its own, this will also become Carl's most difficult battle as he must face it again when he loses Ellie.

A new act in the montage is signaled by a shift in Giacchino's score. It is still the same theme, but he brings back in strings as Ellie paints a picture of Paradise Falls (the place she most wants to visit) and horns as they bring out a jar to save

change for the trip. Once again, a small gesture is used to add to the emotional weight of the moment, when the two cross their hearts in front of the jar. This is a throwback to when Carl promised to take Ellie to Paradise Falls when they were children. He is now working to fulfill that promise again.

The middle act of the montage is comprised of two montages. In a quick series of scenes where time is marked by shifts in light and the smashing of the coin jar, different random life events like Carl breaking his leg and a tree falling on the house are shown getting in the way of Carl and Ellie taking their trip. What is important for the film as a whole, however, is that these events are truly random and normal and both Carl and Ellie treat each event with good humor. There are no villains in this piece and Carl and Ellie still love their very average life. After the last smashing of the jar, the most important emotional notes have been hit: Carl and Ellie love each other very much, they had to go through true tragedy together, they responding to the tragedy with a new dream, and they have stayed positive in the face of every obstacle. It is therefore time for the filmmakers to prepare the viewer for the final chapter of Carl and Ellie's story. In a clever montage within the montage, Carl and Ellie's middle years are portrayed in different scenes of Ellie adjusting Carl's tie before they leave for work at the zoo that ends with Ellie fixing a bowtie on an elderly Carl.

The first scenes of Carl and Ellie's elderly life are as joyful as their young life. Ellie gleefully kisses Carl on the cheek, at work Carl has mastered how to keep his balloon cart from flying away, and in the evening they dance. They are in complete control of their lives and they seem to love it. It is only when the camera pauses

slightly on the abandoned Paradise Falls jar that the viewer remembers their goal from before. During all this happy home time, they have never made it to South America.

During a scene when the two are cleaning the house together, a change in the music along with a paler color scheme indicates a shift in the tone of the film again. The music slows down as Ellie slowly sweeps by the windows of the house. Carl is vacuuming the mantel and comes across an old picture of Ellie as a child in her explorer outfit. He looks up at her painting of Paradise Falls and he frowns sadly. He looks back at Ellie and we can see what he is sad about. She has become an old woman and he never fulfilled his promise. Determined to make it better, Carl goes and buys tickets to Venezuela.

The final tragedy of Carl and Ellie's love story is set up much like the first one. It begins with an emotional high when Carl buys the tickets and it looks like they are going to go to South America. In a close up, Carl tucks the tickets into a picnic basket as he reaches the top of their hill. There is heartbreaking foreshadowing in the color and light of this scene because the couple is having their picnic at sunset. The colors are warm again, but only because the sun is setting. Meanwhile, the music fades to mournful strings. As Carl looks back, Ellie, who always used to race ahead, is struggling to reach the top of the hill. Carl rushes to help her and the Venezuela dream is immediately lost.

The transition to the next shot mimics the pan right of the doctor scene. The camera moves right as it fades into Ellie's hospital room where she lies reading her adventure book. The musical theme begins again, but once again it is just a piano.

This scene is as slow and patient as the lawn scene. A balloon floats in, indicating Carl's presence. He holds her hand as she passes the adventure book to him, in the exact same way he passed it to her when the baby died. She then brushes his cheek, adjusts his tie, just as she always does, and he kisses her as the film fades to Carl sitting in a church bathed in magenta. He sits holding a balloon next to a wreath of flowers and after a moment he stands up, turns, and the background fades to Carl and Ellie's house. The house is washed of all color and the piano slows to its final notes as Carl slowly walks inside.

Carl and Ellie's love story, without counting their introduction as children, is a brief 4 minutes and 17 seconds. It spans decades and there is not a single word spoken. The emotions the sequence evokes in the audience range from pure joy to complete sadness. It has obstacles and acts and the characters develop over the course of the story. After this montage, the viewer can fully understand Carl's attachment to his wife and why he feels the need to go on an adventure and fulfill her dream. It uses the same strategies as the short films to make the audience experience the characters' story along with them and therefore undergo the same emotional development. It experiments with realism just like *The Blue Umbrella* will later on, but instead of doing so with a visual style, it does so with realistic narrative content. "Married Life" is a very human story with adult problems and complex solutions. It is not an idealized reality in that it removes real threats; it is an idealized reality because the characters are able to find joy despite of those threats. The key to Pixar is that Pixar does not want such a reality to be ideal; they want it to be real.

Ultimately “Married Life” does what every Pixar short aspires to. It creates an emotionally resonant story that equips the audience to leave the theater with a more optimistic look at life. “Married Life” gives the viewer an example of a couple who found real happiness together in the face of tragedy. *The Blue Umbrella* lets them see a happy city supported their everyday commute. *Partly Cloudy* shows them that everybody deserves love and the underdog will pull through with the help of a friend. *Presto* gives them a safe space to laugh. *Luxo Jr.* shows them the joy of a father watching a child explore. These films all came from the same studio comprised of many creative minds united under the same mission. The fact that the founders were able to create an environment for these men and women to work freely and express themselves is what is truly revolutionary about Pixar, not their fancy new tools. The Pixar brand is less a look or a single person and more a standard of excellence defined by years of refining the most effective storytelling techniques. Their artistry lies in power of these techniques to make the world just a little bit more magical for their audiences much like when John Lasseter first brought a small lamp to life.

## Selected Filmography

## Pixar Original Short Films

- The Adventures of Andre and Wally B.* Dir. Alvy Ray Smith. Pixar Animation Studios, 1984.
- Luxo Jr.* Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1986.
- Red's Dream.* Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1987.
- Tin Toy.* Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1988.
- Knick Knack.* Dir. John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios, 1989.
- Geri's Game.* Dir. Jan Pinkava. Perf. Bob Peterson. Pixar Animation Studios, 1997.
- For the Birds.* Dir. Ralph Eggleston. Perf. Ralph Eggleston. Pixar Animation Studios, 2000.
- Boundin'.* Dir. Bud Luckey, Roger Gould. Perf. Bud Luckey. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003.
- One Man Band.* Dir. Mark Andrews, Andrew Jimenez. Pixar Animation Studios, 2005.
- Lifted.* Dir. Gary Rydstrom. Pixar Animation Studios, 2006.
- Presto.* Dir. Doug Sweetland. Perf. Doug Sweetland. Pixar Animation Studios, 2008.
- Partly Cloudy.* Dir. Peter Sohn. Perf. Tony Fucile, Lori Richardson. Pixar Animation Studios, 2009.
- Day and Night.* Dir. Teddy Newton. Perf. Wayne Dyer. Pixar Animation Studios, 2010.
- La Luna.* Dir. Enrico Casarosa. Perf. Krista Sheffler, Tony Fucile, Phil Sheridan. Pixar Animation Studios, 2011.
- The Blue Umbrella.* Dir. Saschka Unseld. Perf. Sarah Jaffe. Pixar Animation Studios, 2013.

## Pixar Short Films Inspired By Feature Films

- Mike's New Car.* Dir. Pete Docter, Roger Gould. Perf. Billy Crystal, John Goodman. Pixar Animation Studios, 2002.

*Jack-Jack Attack*. Dir. Brad Bird. Perf. Bret 'Brook' Parker, Bud Luckey, Eli Fucile. Pixar Animation Studios, 2005.

*Mater and the Ghostlight*. Dir. John Lasseter, Dan Scanlon. Perf. Larry the Cable Guy, Owen Wilson, Michael Wallis. Pixar Animation Studios, 2006.

*Your Friend the Rat*. Dir. Jim Capobianco. Perf. Patton Oswalt, Peter Sohn, Lou Romano. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007.

*BURN-E*. Dir. Angus MacLane. Perf. Angus MacLane, Tessa Swigart, Ben Burtt. Pixar Animation Studios, 2008.

*Dug's Special Mission*. Dir. Ronaldo Del Carmen. Perf. Bob Peterson, Delroy Lindo, Jerome Ranft. Pixar Animation Studios, 2009.

*Mater's Tall Tales: Air Mater*. Dir. Rob Gibbs. Perf. Jonathan Adams, Lindsey Collins, Keith Ferguson. Pixar Animation Studios, 2011.

*Toy Story Toons: Hawaiian Vacation*. Dir. Gary Rydstrom. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack. Pixar Animation Studios, 2011.

*Toy Story Toons: Small Fry*. Dir. Angus MacLane. Perf. Lori Alan, Carlos Alazraqui, Tim Allen. Pixar Animation Studios, 2011.

*Mater's Tall Tales: Time Travel Mater*. Dir. Rob Gibbs. Perf. Keith Ferguson, Katherine Helmond, John Michael Higgins. Pixar Animation Studios, 2012.

*Toy Story Toons: Partysaurus Rex*. Dir. Mark A. Walsh. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Wallace Shawn. Pixar Animation Studios, 2012.

*Party Central*. Dir. Kelsey Mann. Perf. Lori Alan, Carlos Alazraqui, Billy Crystal. Pixar Animation Studios, 2014.

#### Other Animated Short Films and TV Shows

*The Dam Keeper*. Dir. Robert Kondo, Daisuke Tsutsumi. Perf. Lars Mikkelsen. 2014.

*Feast*. Dir. Patrick Osborne. Perf. Tommy Snider, Ben Bledsoe, Katie Lowes. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2014.

*Get a Horse!* Dir. Lauren MacMullan. Perf. Walt Disney, Marcellite Garner, Russi Taylor. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2013.

*Paperman*. Dir. John Kahrs. Perf. Jack Goldenberg, John Kahrs, Jeff Turley. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2012.

“La Linea 101.” Dir. Osvaldo Cavandoli. Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 2 Sept. 2006. Web. 5 Mar. 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skb2gKR7rOk>>

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*Looney Tunes*. Warner Bros., 1930-1969. Series.

*Silly Symphonies*. Walt Disney Productions, 1929-1939. Series.

#### Pixar Feature Films

*Toy Story*. Dir. John Lasseter. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Don Rickles. Pixar Animation Studios, 1995.

*A Bug's Life*. Dir. John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton. Perf. Kevin Spacey, Dave Foley, Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Pixar Animation Studios, 1998.

*Toy Story 2*. Dir. John Lasseter, Ash Brannon, Lee Unkrich. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack. Pixar Animation Studios, 1999.

*Monsters, Inc.* Dir. Pete Docter, David Silverman, Lee Unkrich. Perf. Billy Crystal, John Goodman, Mary Gibbs. Pixar Animation Studios, 2001.

*Finding Nemo*. Dir. Andrew Stanton, Lee Unkrich. Perf. Albert Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres, Alexander Gould. Pixar Animation Studios, 2003.

*The Incredibles*. Dir. Brad Bird. Perf. Craig T. Nelson, Samuel L. Jackson, Holly Hunter. Pixar Animation Studios, 2004.

*Cars*. Dir. John Lasseter, Joe Ranft. Perf. Owen Wilson, Bonnie Hunt, Paul Newman. Pixar Animation Studios, 2006.

*Ratatouille*. Dir. Brad Bird, Jan Pinkava. Perf. Brad Garrett, Lou Romano, Patton Oswalt. Pixar Animation Studios, 2007.

*WALL-E*. Dir. Andrew Stanton. Perf. Ben Burtt, Elissa Knight, Jeff Garlin. Pixar Animation Studios, 2008.

*Up*. Dir. Pete Docter, Bob Peterson. Perf. Edward Asner, Jordon Nagai, John Ratzenberger. Pixar Animation Studios, 2009.

*Toy Story 3*. Dir. Lee Unkrich. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack. Pixar Animation Studios, 2010.

*Cars 2*. Dir. John Lasseter, Brad Lewis. Perf. Owen Wilson, Larry the Cable Guy, Michael Caine. Pixar Animation Studios, 2011.

*Brave*. Dir. Mark Andrews, Brenda Chapman, Steve Purcell. Perf. Kelly Macdonald, Billy Connolly, Emma Thompson. Pixar Animation Studios, 2012.

*Monsters University*. Dir. Dan Scanlon. Perf. Billy Crystal, John Goodman, Steve Buscemi. Pixar Animation Studios, 2013.

#### Other Animated Feature Films

*Big Hero 6*. Dir. Don Hall, Chris Williams. Perf. Ryan Potter, Scott Adsit, Jamie Chung. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2014.

*The Book of Life*. Dir. Jorge R. Gutierrez. Perf. Diego Luna, Zoe Saldana, Channing Tatum. Reel FX Animation, 2014.

*The Boxtrolls*. Dir. Graham Annable, Anthony Stacchi. Perf. Ben Kingsley, Jared Harris, Nick Frost. Laika Entertainment, 2014.

*How to Train Your Dragon 2*. Dir. Dean DeBlois. Perf. Jay Baruchel, Cate Blanchett, Gerard Butler. DreamWorks Animation, 2014.

*The Lego Movie*. Dir. Phil Lord, Christopher Miller. Perf. Chris Pratt, Will Arnett, Elizabeth Banks. Warner Bros, 2014.

*Frozen*. Dir. Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee. Perf. Kristen Bell, Idina Menzel, Jonathan Groff. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2013.

*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*. Dir. Cody Cameron, Kris Pearn. Perf. Bill Hader, Anna Faris, Will Forte. Sony Pictures Animation, 2013.

*Despicable Me 2*. Dir. Pierre Coffin, Chris Renaud. Perf. Steve Carell, Kristin Wiig, Benjamin Bratt. Universal Pictures, 2013.

*The Croods*. Dir. Kirk DeMicco, Chris Sanders. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Ryan Reynolds, Emma Stone. DreamWorks Animation, 2013.

*Ernest & Celestine*. Dir. Stéphane Aubier, Vincent Patar, Benjamin Renner. Perf. Forest Whitaker, Lambert Wilson, Pauline Brunner. Le Parti Productions, 2012.

*Wreck-It Ralph*. Dir. Rich Moore. Perf. John C. Reilly, Jack McBrayer, Jane Lynch. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2012.

*Frankenweenie*. Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Winona Ryder, Catherine O'Hara, Martin Short. Walt Disney Pictures, Tim Burton Productions, 2012.

*From Up on Poppy Hill*. Dir. Goro Miyazaki. Perf. Sarah Bolger, Chris Noth, Anton Yelchin. Studio Ghibli, 2011.

*Rio*. Dir. Carlos Saldanha. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Anne Hathaway, George Lopez. Twentieth Century Fox Animation, Blue Sky Studios, 2011.

*Tangled*. Dir. Nathan Greno, Byron Howard. Perf. Mandy Moore, Zachary Levi, Donna Murphy. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2010.

*The Illusionist*. Dir. Sylvain Chomet. Perf. Jean-Claude Donda, Eilidh Rankin, Duncan MacNeil. Pathé, 2010.

*Despicable Me*. Dir. Pierre Coffin, Chris Renaud. Perf. Steve Carell, Jason Segal, Russell Brand. Universal Pictures, 2010.

*How to Train Your Dragon*. Dir. Dean DeBlois, Chris Sanders. Perf. Jay Baruchel, Gerard Butler, Christopher Mintz-Plasse. DreamWorks Animation, 2010.

*The Princess and the Frog*. Dir. Ron Clements, John Musker. Perf. Anika Noni Rose, Keith David, Oprah Winfrey. Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2009.

*Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Bill Murray. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2009.

*The Secret of Kells*. Dir. Tomm Moore, Nora Twomey. Perf. Evan McGuire, Brendan Gleeson, Mick Lally. Les Armateurs, 2009.

*Coraline*. Dir. Henry Selick. Perf. Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, John Hodgman. Laika Entertainment, 2009.

*Ponyo*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Cate Blanchett, Matt Damon, Liam Neeson. Studio Ghibli, 2008.

*Howl's Moving Castle*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Chieko Baishô, Takuya Kimura, Tatsuya Gashûin. Studio Ghibli, 2004.

*Lilo and Stitch*. Dir. Dean DeBlois, Chris Sanders. Perf. Daveigh Chase, Chris Sanders, Tia Carrere. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 2002.

*Spirited Away*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Daveigh Chase, Suzanne Pleshette, Miyu Irino. Studio Ghibli, 2001.

*Shrek*. Dir. Andrew Adamson, Vicky Jenson. Perf. Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz. DreamWorks Animation, 2001.

*The Emperor's New Groove*. Dir. Mark Dindal. Perf. David Spade, John Goodman, Eartha Kitt. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 2000.

*The Iron Giant*. Dir. Brad Bird. Perf. Eli Marienthal, Harry Connick Jr., Jennifer Aniston. Warner Bros., 1999.

*Mulan*. Dir. Tony Bancroft, Barry Cook. Perf. Ming-Na Wen, Eddie Murphy, Rita Hsiao. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1998.

*Princess Mononoke*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Yôji Matsuda, Yuriko Ishida, Yûko Tanaka. Studio Ghibli, 1997.

*Hercules*. Dir. Ron Clements, John Musker. Perf. Tate Donovan, Susan Egan, James Woods. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1997.

*The Lion King*. Dir. Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff. Perf. Matthew Broderick, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1994.

*The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Dir. Henry Selick. Perf. Danny Elfman, Chris Sarandon, Catherine O'Hara. Skellington Productions Inc., Tim Burton Productions, 1993.

*Aladdin*. Dir. Ron Clements, John Musker. Perf. Scott Weinger, Robin Williams, Linda Larkin. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1992.

*Beauty and the Beast*. Dir. Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise. Perf. Paige O'Hara, Robby Benson, Richard White. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1991.

*The Little Mermaid*. Dir. Ron Clements, John Musker. Perf. Jodi Benson, Samuel E. Wright, Rene Auberjonois. Walt Disney Pictures, 1989.

*Kiki's Delivery Service*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Kirsten Dunst, Minami Takayama, Rei Sakuma. Studio Ghibli, 1989.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, Joanna Cassidy. Touchstone Pictures, 1988. *Netflix*. Web. 28 March 2015.

*Grave of the Fireflies*. Dir. Isao Takahata. Perf. Tsutomu Tatsumi, Ayano Shiraishi, Akemi Yamaguchi. Studio Ghibli, 1988.

*My Neighbor Totoro*. Dir. Hayao Miyazaki. Perf. Hitoshi Takagi, Noriko Hidaka, Toshiyuki Amagasa. Studio Ghibli, 1988.

*Robin Hood*. Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Perf. Brian Bedford, Phil Harris, Roger Miller. Walt Disney Productions, 1973.

*The Aristocats*. Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Perf. Phil Harris, Eva Gabor, Sterling Holloway. Walt Disney Productions, 1970.

*The Sword in the Stone*. Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Perf. Rickie Sorensen, Sebastian Cabot, Karl Swenson. Walt Disney Productions, 1963.

*Peter Pan*. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske. Perf. Bobby Driscoll, Kathryn Beaumont, Hans Conried. Walt Disney Productions, 1953.

*Bambi*. Dir. James Algar, Samuel Armstrong, David Hand, Graham Heid, Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield, Norman Wright. Perf. Hardie Albright, Stan Alexander, Bobette Audrey. Walt Disney Productions, 1942.

*Dumbo*. Dir. Samuel Armstrong, Norman Ferguson, Wilfred Jackson, Jack Kinney, Bill Roberts, Ben Sharpsteen. Perf. Sterling Holloway, Edward Brophy, James Baskett. Walt Disney Productions, 1941.

*Fantasia*. Dir. Norman Ferguson. Perf. Leopold Stokowski, Deems Taylor, Corey Burton. Walt Disney Pictures, 1940.

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Dir. William Cottrell, David Hand, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen. Perf. Adrianna Caselotti, Harry Stockwell, Lucille La Verne. Walt Disney Productions, 1937.

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*It's a Wonderful Life*. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore. Liberty Films, 1946.

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Jean Arthur, Claude Rains. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1939.

*You Can't Take it with You*. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Jean Arthur, James Stewart, Lionel Barrymore. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1938.

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*The Pixar Story*. Dir. Leslie Iwerks. Perf. Stacy Keach, John Lasseter, Brad Bird. Leslie Iwerks Productions, 2007.

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