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RURAL MINDS
A VISUAL NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

“Multimedia” — it is a term that can encompass anything from video games to YouTube videos to the latest iPad application. Without a doubt, the Internet provides unprecedented opportunities for creative expression, but how will the fundamental structure of our aesthetic experiences be altered by this new age, and what new genres will take root in the 21st century? This “visual novel” attempts to answer that question by utilizing different forms of media in unison to create a singular aesthetic experience. Using the written word, voiceover, sound effects, photography, film, original music and interactivity, this project is the essence of multimedia and tells the humorous story of a college-aged young man coming to terms with the frustrations of living in a rural town. In the process of his awakening, which delves into the nature of dreams, activism and friendship, the visual novel depicts tender human moments and is an exercise in seeing how multimedia can be exploited to create meaningful experiences on par with traditional forms of storytelling

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Minds can be accessed at the following URL:

ruralminds.organanet.net

The project was conceived with intent of combining various forms of media — such as film, text, music and other sounds — into a multimedia genre called the “visual novel.” This combination of different aesthetic styles and media has a long tradition that can be seen in many kinds of entertainment: Film often makes use of music and text in order to engage its audience; spoken word poetry can be combined with interpretive dance to create meaning beyond the experience of simply reading words on a page; video games utilize text, visuals and interactivity to maintain an audience’s interest; albums can tell stories through the combination of their songs and album art; and forms of theater often accompany music when it is played live.

Any number of both ancient and modern examples exists, but the point is this: A major aspect of creating aesthetic experiences concerns experimentation with the underlying assumptions of different genres, pushing boundaries by exploiting the strengths and circumventing the weaknesses of distinct media. Among the most influential artists are those who uncover new possibilities with their work, creating meaning with a particular form of art in an innovative way. As structure is an inherent part of how an aesthetic object generates its meaning, anyone who *creates* — whether film, poetry, music, theater, dance (the list could continue) — is, to an extent, wrestling with the limitations of a genre. However, far from making incidental decisions, creators of experimental genres often toy deliberately with form in order to push art into new directions.

That said, like many works in the contemporary multimedia scene, Rural Minds is situated in this context of experimentation. In particular, it was created with the possibilities of the Internet

in mind, and it uses the Internet as both a medium and method for distribution. Indeed, the rise of tablet computers and smartphones offers a wealth of opportunities to mold refreshing kinds of multimedia experiences. For example, Al Gore released the first interactive book of its kind, Our Choice, for the iPhone in 2011, a work which simultaneously makes use of text, informational graphics, photographs and filmic footage. Published through Push Pop Press, one of the first publishing platforms for interactive books, it exhibits a potential framework for textual works of the future. Though Push Pop Press has since been contracted by Facebook to work on other projects, the fact remains that individuals, given the current possibilities with new technologies, are attempting to envision new methods of conveying narrative, and Rural Minds is an attempt to be a part of that re-envisioning process.

Rural Minds draws inspiration for its form from film, poetry (specifically haiku and concrete poetry), video games, fiction, photography, and multimedia journalism. An in-depth analysis of the work will follow this introduction, detailing the thought process behind each component's creation and how these sources of inspiration fit into its framework. However, it will prove beneficial to first draw attention to some core ideas that influenced its conception.

To begin, Rural Minds is currently classified as a "visual novel" for several reasons. It is concerned primarily with manipulating a linear narrative's aesthetic space and time by using different media, the end goal being to create a unique pacing and overall feeling that is different from that of traditional genres. In this sense, the word "novel" refers to what appears to be the essence of the work: a linear narrative that is viewed through the perspective of one character, with points of conflict, a plot and a conclusion. The "visual" aspect, though, is equally important, and it refers to the film and photographs used to illustrate the novel's settings and interactions, making the narrative more immersive than if it were simply conveyed through text. Though other

elements do help give the project its vitality, Rural Minds is at its core simply a storybook for adults, unfolding with the pacing of a novel, utilizing text to explore the psyche of a character while exploiting visual media to illustrate his interactions with the outside world.

The term “visual novel” did exist before Rural Minds was created; however, Rural Minds is not a visual novel in the traditional sense of the term. Generally, a visual novel refers to an interactive fictional work from Japan that is similar to a “choose your own adventure story.” From the same realm as video games — and in fact, played on the same systems — these visual novels offer the user the option to make decisions that influence the course of a narrative, resulting in one of multiple endings. Usually these pieces take the form of dating simulators, granting the user one of several girlfriends at the novel’s conclusion, and they are often illustrated in the style of Japanese manga, accompanied by text, voiceovers and music. Though these pieces of entertainment are popular in Japan, they have gotten little traction in the United States, and Rural Minds is in part an American response to the Japanese conception of a visual novel. Importantly, Rural Minds differs from those visual novels in several ways, and describing them will shed light on some of the ideas underlying Rural Minds, as well as help understand exactly what this project does differently from works in other existing popular genres.

Most significantly, Rural Minds is concerned with the *linear* narrative, not with interactivity or user feedback. Notably, there is only one conclusion to Rural Minds with no possibility of alternate endings. Partly this is a consequence of feasibility; partly it is because interactivity is not in accordance with its themes. To include interactivity would necessitate a response in the content of Rural Minds to the idea of interactivity, and such a response would distract from the overall tone and message of the piece. In addition, Rural Minds is an argument for the possibility of creating engaging, multimedia, singular aesthetic experiences — in the tradition of novels,

films and poetry — that do not include the possibility of copious amounts of user input. The reasoning behind this is that, while Rural Minds utilizes interactivity to increase immersion into the plot, it assumes that viewers will take away varying interpretations of its content even if only one ending is possible, which is already interactivity enough. In this way, Rural Minds argues for depth of experience rather than breadth.

That first point assumes the second, which is that Rural Minds has a different audience from that of traditional visual novels. Rather than shooting for a niche group already intimately familiar with commercial, high budget video games, Rural Minds attempts to appeal to the broader audience of a general adult viewer. With this in mind, its content is for the most part nothing outlandish or inaccessible to an older audience; it is simply a familiar coming-of-age story packaged in a slightly new way. Many aesthetic decisions proceed from this choice, including the one to outright reject the dating simulation genre, as well as to film Rural Minds with live actors. New forms of media tend to gravitate toward abstractions of real life, whether through computer graphics or animations; the choice to use live actors was thus made deliberately to break free of this tendency. Said differently, most visual novels already utilize animation, so why make another visual novel like those that already exist? General audiences are also much more familiar with genres that use live actors as “serious” ones, and without a doubt, Rural Minds is trying to find legitimacy for popular multimedia pieces in that space.

Also important to note is that Rural Minds was intended from its inception as strictly a standalone multimedia piece. This is a direct response to today’s popular method of combining disparate media forms through *transmedia storytelling*, or telling one story across multiple legacy formats. A legacy format is a form of traditional media, such as a novel, video game or film, from which any new form of media draws its inspiration. An example of transmedia

storytelling would be telling one part of a narrative through a standalone novel, then continuing to tell that narrative through a standalone video game, et cetera, the purpose being to attract audiences to different forms of media, as well as extend the life of a particularly poignant storyline or set of characters. Even Our Choice was originally released in the legacy format of a nonfiction book in 2009, and it was only republished as an interactive application in 2011. In contrast, Rural Minds was conceived from the very beginning as a multimedia piece and is not tied to any legacy formats — *it has always been a visual novel*. This is essential, as none of the elements in Rural Minds were added as an afterthought; rather, they are meant to work in conjunction with one another toward creating a coherent aesthetic experience.

This particular vision of the visual novel responds as well to the prevalent use of multimedia in nonfictional works. In fact, the idea for Rural Minds was born out of practicing multimedia journalism, which has been making use of text, photographs, videos, graphics and music to tell documentary-style stories since newspapers began having a presence on the Web. Borrowing story structures from other narrative forms, including film and fiction, journalists combine voiceovers, music, film and still photography to illustrate narratives, and the union of these media generates a different overall aesthetic feeling than television, film or fiction. Said in another way, these multimedia journalism pieces are a unique genre of their own — one whose techniques can, in turn, be appropriated once again by films and fiction. Taking inspiration from multimedia journalism, then, Rural Minds utilizes some of those techniques and structures in its overall presentation to draw the reader to decidedly *fictional* content, breaking free from the constraints of documentary work.

Lastly, Rural Minds is intended to be greater than the sum of its parts. While its individual snapshots, filmic scenes or other components may not be innovative by themselves or even the

best representative examples of particular genres, when used in conjunction with original text, music, and other elements, the hope is that a unique time and space, inherent to visual novels, will be born. Rural Minds is largely an attempt to discover what format of the visual novel will work, if any at all, as well as to generate new ideas in the process. This is by no means the last visual novel that will be created, and creators of future projects of this kind can learn from what did and did not work with Rural Minds.

Ultimately, this project serves more as a rough idea of what a visual novel could look like than a completed, masterful work. In short, this project is just the beginning. Visual novels may eventually gain a foothold in the market with an audience among smartphone and tablet users; perhaps they can even be sold as downloadable content using existing distribution models for the Wii, PS3, or Xbox 360. Until then, a general working framework needs to be established, the visual novel's strengths and weaknesses need to be assessed, and talented teams of creative people need to tell memorable stories using the visual novel genre. The long-term vision is to create a new vehicle for storytelling that can stand alongside video games, fiction, and film. Rural Minds is certainly a humble start down a long road — one that is as uncertain as it is refreshing.

ANALYSIS

Title Screen

In other media, the opening title screen is an essential aspect of the modern viewing experience. I say this particularly in reference to DVDs and video games, but one can draw similar comparisons to genres that do not have title screens, such as artwork, books, or albums. In any case, each medium has its packaging, so to speak, that sets up certain expectations for the content within. That said, I made full use of this screen to not only place the visual novel in the same aesthetic realm as films on DVD and most commercial video games, but to give the viewer a sense of the overall feeling of *Rural Minds*, as well as the themes it would address.

One of the central goals of *Rural Minds* is to elicit and convey certain emotions in a way that would be impossible in fiction. Using text, a photo, and music, then, I attempted to create a mixture of fantasy, nostalgia and loneliness in this title screen. With the words “New Story,” I attempted to bring several connotations to mind, including the expectation that the multimedia experience will be a narrative with characters, a beginning, middle and end, et cetera. The screen is meant, in essence, to evoke the feeling of a storybook. The music, purposefully dreamy and quiet, can remind one of lazy, suburban summer days. The photograph, working in conjunction with the music to create this general feeling, helps to illustrate a general sense of isolation.

Readers will always have radically different reactions to written text, though it is somewhat more feasible to control the realm of emotions with film, photography, art, and especially music. Even if an artist cannot bring an audience to *feel* a particular emotion through these media, often that audience can be brought to *understand* it from a distance in a way that is more powerful than the use of plain text. This opening screen, in that regard, is an exercise in exploring the power of these other media to preface a novel-like experience.

Introductory Video

Taking inspiration from multimedia journalism, I started the project with a video in order to immediately attract the viewer's attention. In multimedia journalism stories, short heading videos are used to introduce viewers to the story's characters and themes. Beyond that, a video's purpose is make the viewer interested enough that he will read the written text that follows. The same principle applies here.

Entirely conscious of the trite themes of the Rural Minds and how easily it fits into the category of the *bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age story, I tried to undercut the melodrama and angst wherever possible, as well as introduce satirical themes that reach beyond the main character's personal life. The Occupy Wall Street chants of "we are the 99 percent" situate the story in time, and the opening interview introduces the viewer to a key character, Kara, as well as explains the legitimacy of the protest, raising real issues regarding the privatization of Pennsylvania State University. The interview is also meant to mimic the style of documentary journalism, as if this were a piece of nonfiction.

The especially outspoken protester holding the torn American flag represents Rural Minds's contradictory and absurd voice of reason. His proclamation of "we want cheaper meat" is a tongue-in-cheek criticism of the United States' selfishness and obsession with meat products. He also represents the stock crazed protester that one often finds at rallies, and his inclusion in part serves to mock the nature of protesting and free speech.

The exchange between Ian and Braden introduces the main characters, and it sets up the contrast between the nature of the public and personal life. These characters are meant to be representative of college-aged adults. They treat their own depression with casual detachment, as if depression is to be expected at their age. The scene is meant to be humorous.

Exiting from the video, the transition to the next scene is meant to show that depression is much harder to treat casually when one is alone.

The Graffiti Tunnel (part 1)

As we transition to our first textual set piece, a flashback, I use photographs and sound effects to set a decidedly somber tone. The primary inspiration for this component of the visual novel comes from Japanese role-playing video games, particularly the Final Fantasy series. These works often put the gamer into specific virtual settings, allowing him to explore the space at his leisure while listening to a soundtrack. This technique arises from the Japanese tradition of haiku and poetry in general, in which an attempt is made to evoke “stillness” in the viewer, or to create an atmosphere of completeness using limited words. I attempted to do the same thing here, giving the viewer a space to explore using photographs, music and sound effects to create a particular mood. The option to transition back and forth between photos at one’s leisure, rather than going through them in a timed sequence as would be the case in a simple video, is meant to be indicative of Ian’s brooding state of mind.

Some other points: The text during the opening transition, “Welcome to Hell,” shows the viewer that we are about to learn more about Ian’s state of depression. The music evokes a sense of mystery, sadness, wonder, and hope; it also introduces many of the piece’s main musical themes, which we will return to throughout the novel. Making use of the written word’s effective treatment of introspection, I give the reader a glimpse of the workings of Ian’s mind with several paragraphs, as well as provide some background on the setting of the graffiti tunnel. Using this text alongside photographs, I wanted to give the viewer a strong sense of the environment. In

fact, I use the quick succession of photographs to literally show the viewer the way into Hell, as a well-developed setting is essential in generating the sense of “stillness” described above.

The Breakup

This scene, a flashback within a flashback, is meant to humanize Ian. The black-and-white photos, at smaller dimensions than the previous pictures, and the solo piano music, serve to create a sentimental sense of nostalgia, akin to the emotions evoked by certain Hallmark cards or jewelry commercials during Christmastime.

The influence from role-playing video games continues into this scene. I give the viewer the option to remain in the area until he is ready to advance to the next section.

The Graffiti Tunnel (part 2)

Returning to the graffiti tunnel, I introduce the visual novel’s first interactive element.

The viewer has the option to click on any one of the words floating around Ian. By involving the viewer in the unfolding of the narrative, even in this small way, I intend to maintain interest and make the viewer an active participant in the unfolding of the plot. The scenes brought about by different links serve to make light of Ian’s state of depression, most of all the images regarding Froot Loops, which with their color are a vibrant contrast to his mood.

Up to this point, I have tried to tickle the viewer’s brain in several different locations by using different media. My hope is that, by this point, the work begins to take on a life of its own in terms of creating an aesthetic space and time unique to visual novels.

Music in Calder Way

This sequence takes a cue from stop-motion music videos. Popular music is often written without a particular video in mind, in which case the video simply becomes an afterthought to sell the legacy form, in this case the pop song. Though this is not always the case, the video often tells a small story with little context; often the story is profoundly limited in scope.

In response to this, I chose to create a sequence whose music and visual contents were all conceived at the same moment — and all for the purpose of illustrating a specific emotion in a particular work. Music videos represent a different way of seeing than films, and I use it here to continue varying the experience for the viewer.

The contents of the stop-motion video, using a variety of buzzwords and proper nouns, further situates the story in time and is decidedly politically progressive in nature. Again, it is supposed to be humorous while bringing outside issues into the work's diegesis to undercut the melodrama.

Waiting for the Bus

I return to the film format to show an interaction between Ian and Braden, as film is particularly good at bringing characters to life and showing the nuances of their relationships. I also take this opportunity, using the visuals and sound effects of the passing bus, to introduce the theme of traveling, which will be developed later in the novel. Here we also have the first intersection between video and other media, namely with photographs and text. Rather than use video, I chose to use photographs to illustrate Ian's glazed state of consciousness at the bar, and showing the words "the city" floating above Ian and Braden's heads suggests that the idea of the urban landscape is one firmly entrenched in both of their minds.

By this point, my intention is for the viewer to have a good sense of the interior of Ian's mind. The tension between Ian's personal thoughts and his public life should slowly become apparent and more poignant as the story progresses.

Reflection on Cities and Traveling

Using still photographs and audio, this section makes use of text to develop an essay-like perspective on the nature of rural living. Here, I continue developing the idea of traveling, brought up in the last section, to add depth to the filmic experiences that will follow.

The Protest – Meeting Kara

Multimedia journalism techniques find their way into this section. I use a voiceover, reminiscent of journalism interviews, to allow us to hear Ian's perspective on life in his own words. This, as well as the scene with the child eating the ice cream, is supposed to humanize him a bit more.

During the protest, the words "I once dreamed I could do anything, and I wanted to capture the entire world in my hands" appear onscreen. This marriage between video and text allows me to write content that may not sound particularly good as a voiceover, and yet, is more genuinely representative of Ian's internal state of mind than a voiceover would be.

A satirical speech on the steps of Old Main is meant to continue undercutting the melodrama. It also externalizes the absurdity of Ian's internal state of mind, showing a person who has clearly lost his definitive handle on reality and no longer cares to hide it. My thought is that, if Ian continues going about business as usual, he may someday end up like the crazed protester. In

this way, the contents of the entire visual novel should be considered while keeping in mind the mocking voice of this protester, who to my mind represents the only sane voice in the piece.

And yet, Ian takes a generally sympathetic view toward the protesters, even if one of them is abjectly eccentric, admiring the fact that they care so much about an issue and that they have a purpose. In reality, however, the protesters could be any group of people — Ian is just getting swept up in the general passion of people who choose to be active with their lives.

The dance number represents a high point in Ian's mood. With the inclusion of his ex-girlfriend in the scene, we can see that it is clearly a fantasy and, sadly enough, that the mood is only temporary.

Kara's Philosophy

This is a simple exchange to develop the characters. It was necessary at this point for Ian to meet Kara, and film, using the over-the-shoulder point of view, seemed like the most effective way to show the interaction. This quiet scene also serves to bring the energy back down after the previous section.

Ian's House

The use of photos and interactivity in this section is meant to continue building the world of the visual novel, establishing the setting of Ian's house for later scenes, as well as allowing the viewer to explore a concrete space at his leisure by clicking through the pictures. In video games, designing the architecture of the game world is key to the experience, as the gamer will have the chance to examine that space during the course of the narrative. I aim to do the same thing in this section, albeit through the use of photos and not computer graphics. Also, I allow the viewer to

click on various objects to learn more about how those objects relate to Ian's life. The background music not only helps sustain the viewer's interest but also encourages the viewer to feel a certain detachment from Ian's life.

As we transition to Ian's bed, the music becomes much more contemplative, dark and dramatic, drawing the viewer into Ian's thoughts. During the process of falling asleep, many phrases cross his mind. By being able to read them, we get an even better sense of Ian as a person. These words also develop themes of dreaming and sleep, which we will return to throughout the piece.

Kara Stays Over

This video, meant to be humorous, captures Kara's character in a way that would have been impossible in any other medium. The camera, showing stillness and silence as both Kara and Ian get ready for sleep, prepares the viewer for the next section.

The Dream

One of the set pieces of the visual novel, this dream sequence accomplishes several things: It reflects on the nature of traveling using sound effects of the bus; like in Ian's house, it shows a particular area in detail through the use of photos and allows the text to inhabit that concrete space; and it creates a particular mood through use of moody lighting and music.

This is the most interactive component of the work. It is largely an experiment in seeing whether a viewer, with the added elements of text and music, will be interested in clicking through photographs to explore such a space in the context of an aesthetic work. Does this set

piece have enough momentum? Does it need more text to work? Is the viewer feeling immersed, or is he simply bored?

Reaching certain photographs will allow the viewer to leave the dream and continue with the story, though my hope is that some viewers will choose to continue exploring the area when presented with that option.

Eating Breakfast

This video is used to elicit a laugh with the continued use of Froot Loops as one of the novel's key images. Here, we reflect on the color and texture of the cereal, which is a bit otherworldly. Given the previous section, this image is particularly grounding and lets the viewer know that the novel has returned to the physical world, and yet, the inclusion of the bright cereal and its somewhat unreal qualities plays off of the distinction between real life and fantasy.

The abrupt transition to the bus is an attempt to find the right pacing when both videos and still photos are accompanied by introspective text in the same piece. As I came to this point in the creation of the visual novel, I began to ask myself, is there a "sweet spot" between the media that will sustain a viewer's interest, or are such transitions inherently too abrupt to maintain tension in a work?

Getting Jaded

Fading in with sound effects from the bar, I attempt here to show character development of the individuals surrounding Ian's life, illustrating how disenfranchised he is by the expression on his face. By showing these characters' backstories upon being clicked, I wanted to show an

example of how one can misjudge individuals and that they can be extremely complicated beneath the surface of expectation.

The word jumble is homage to concrete poetry, spontaneous prose, and other forms of creativity that emphasize form and process rather than content. I thought I would use it to illustrate Ian's increasing insanity as he grows more disillusioned with his surroundings.

Confrontation with Kara

Here, I let the dialogue run without showing any visuals at first, and then I fade in with a picture of the depressed poetry that Ian has written. In movies, characters often artificially read letters and notes out loud when those textual elements become essential elements of the plot, but not constrained by filmic time, I can actually allow the viewer to read the note at his leisure.

Upon finishing the note, the viewer transitions to a video in which Kara attempts to break the barrier into Ian's personal life to help him, but Ian refuses. My hope is that this scene, due to the viewer's knowledge of Ian's thoughts, will be complex and layered in a way unique to the visual novel format. Perhaps this scene would feel different if *Rural Minds* were a film. Regardless, Kara's flirtation with Ian's interiority is brief, and we then continue to the next section.

Contemplating the City

Using music, I begin setting up the visual novel for its inevitable conclusion. Presenting photographs to maintain interest and text to explain abstract ideas, I hope to circumvent the "show, don't tell" rule that is one of the core tenets of creative writing, by showing and telling *at the same time*, albeit by using two mediums at once. Eventually, we transition to contemplative words reflecting on the nature of the city. I use photographs and sound effects of the urban

environment to ground the text, again making these abstract concepts more interesting to read and overall more accessible than if they had been mere words on a page. The footage from the Reason Rally finishes on the theme of atheism, which has long existed beneath the surface of the visual novel but only comes to the foreground at this moment.

Conclusion and Credits

In this video, Ian mounts the bus, either to pull away from his hometown or return to it (I leave this up to interpretation). The visual of the bus seems most fitting to end a project that deals largely with the idea of traveling.

The background music to the credits is one of the keys to the entire work. It echoes many of the themes present throughout the visual novel:

Go to sleep
What havens we seek
Go to sleep
An anger so fleeting
Go to sleep
I'm leaving to Wandering
Go to sleep
I can't sleep

The entire work is a meditation on the idea of environment — whether by showing that environment using photographs or by commenting on the effects of living rurally. Ian's obsession with the city is indicative of how important this is to him. Yet in sleep one can always escape reality, losing anger with the world in the process and finding an opportunity to live within the fantasy realm of one's own mind. Unfortunately, oftentimes it is hard to sleep, and one can never escape reality for very long.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This project is the end product after reflecting on the meaning of narrative and how that meaning is both created and transmitted across different media; it then uses that understanding to redefine how meaning can be constructed in an artistic work. In other words, Rural Minds only exists because of analyzing the works from various genres, flipping some of their aesthetic techniques upside down, altering others, and leaving many of them untouched; it ultimately mashes those techniques together into one piece to see what parts of such a pastiche would be most effective. This project was also meant to serve as a skeleton of a visual novel; from here, it will now be possible to see what content can remain, what can be added, and what can be eliminated. Perhaps most importantly, it serves as a showpiece for potential collaborators. What if, rather than one person, an entire creative team of photographers, videographers, writers, musicians, poets and choreographers was involved in the process of creating a visual novel?

A visual novel is a collaborative art form. There are dozens of elements I would change with this project if given the opportunity, including the contracting of professional actors, the capturing of better audio, the storyboarding of scenes before filming, the revision of dialogue, the editing of textual elements, the analysis of which themes and metaphors worked or not, the contracting of professional musicians, et cetera. In particular, I would have experimented more with the different media, combining them in different and more radical ways. However, my chief concern with this project was to create a coherent work from beginning to end, and in doing so, I realized that I was adapting my use of different media to the arguments of the story and not the other way around.

For me, this is the most interesting aspect of multimedia — that it expands the possibilities regarding what realms of the human experience can be expressed through storytelling. Rather

than saying that certain narratives would not work as novels or films, or introducing extraneous elements to adapt certain narratives to those genres, multimedia visual novels allow us to use every piece of media at our disposal to make those narratives come to life. In this way, rather than forcing a particular kind of story into the confines of other traditional artistic formats, we can now, using multimedia, develop a genre most suited for the task of conveying that story.

That thought leads me to the following: What sort of story, then, would make for the best visual novel? How would that experience be unique and engaging as a visual novel, as opposed to another format? What elements can be introduced to a future visual novel — a genre currently in its infancy — to make a more powerful aesthetic experience?

Before *Rural Minds* was created, for me, it was difficult to ponder these questions. It is not that works utilizing similar techniques do not already exist, but many of them are tied to legacy formats and, during their conception, they were never envisioned primarily as fictional works of multimedia. *Rural Minds*, being born foremost as a *visual novel*, is an attempt to see how a linear narrative's space and time can be manipulated to create a singular, innovative aesthetic experience, without being tied to those cumbersome traditional formats.

As a last point, *Rural Minds* is a response to the growing digitization of our culture and popularity of virtual worlds. Rather than drawing viewers with the promise of extensive interactivity, my goal is to provide a linear work, rich with content, and leave that single work open to interpretation. Linear narrative has existed for thousands of years. While the potential aesthetic power of interactive social media and other sorts of new media cannot be understated, I see the visual novel mostly as an evolution of the traditional filmic, novelistic and poetic formats. Whether users will be interested in such an experience remains to be seen, but as I said, *Rural Minds* is only the beginning. It is difficult to predict what form the visual novel will take in

the coming years, and with any luck, the genre will grow beyond its infancy and projects much better than *Rural Minds* will surface. In any case, now is the time to start developing these multimedia genres, and with the Internet as a powerful method for distribution, traditional media giants may someday soon have a new booming media industry to contend with.

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Visual and Editorial Intern

What’s Up Buenos Aires? (WUBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina

- Communicated in Spanish to clients and interviewees, photographing local businesses and writing about them for promotional display on the *WUBA* website
- Researched the city’s cultural events and wrote hip, bilingual descriptions for a young audience, updating a calendar with information for concerts, art exhibits and festivals

Fall 2010

Editorial Assistant

Comparative Literature Studies (CLS), State College, PA

- Solicited book reviews and edited articles for the Department of Comparative Literature’s academic journal; communicated with professors worldwide and researched their biographies and areas of expertise in order to update a database of contact information

Spring 2010

Lead Designer

Cultural Expressions, State College, PA

- Designed monthly 8-page newsletter addressing multicultural issues and trained students to use InDesign; edited articles for grammar, spelling, and content

Fall 2008 -
Spring 2010

Writer

GotGame.com

- Created features related to the video game industry in Wordpress, revising HTML formatting for online blog posts, editing photos and graphics to go with them

Summer 2009 -
Fall 2009

Diversity / Books Reporter

The Daily Collegian, State College, PA (daily circulation: 20,000)

- Wrote AP style articles and reviews about literary events, diversity issues and cultural events
- Maintained a blog about books; enhanced interview preparation and research skills

Spring 2009 -
Fall 2009

SKILLS

- Languages: Spanish (fluent); French (moderate)
- Audacity; Soundslides; Final Cut; Premiere, InDesign; Photoshop; Illustrator; Flash
- HTML; CSS; Wordpress; Editorial Manager; Lotus Notes; Word; PowerPoint; Excel