— WRITING SAMPLE —
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Includes appended documents:
Description of Support Material Submitted (Items 1 and 2) and *Budget Summary*

Application for
Canada Council for the Arts
Grant to Film and Video Artists:
Production Grant
2002

Stephen X. Arthur:
"Tran Scan"
Experimental Project

Part B2 —
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Proposed: To produce a ten-minute experimental animation film based on the submitted test results of my earlier Canada Council Creative Development Grant in Media Arts (Item 1). This visual art film is an original means of "landscape pixilation." It will travel in time-lapse across Canada, combined with appropriation and morphing of a range of historical landscape paintings.

Pages included:

Table of Contents

Stephen Arthur: *"Tran Scan"* film/video production
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (2002)
Section 1:

Underlying Concepts

(experimental project)

Introduction to the Project

I propose to produce a ten-minute experimental animation film based on the submitted test results of my earlier **Canada Council Creative Development Grant in Media Arts (Item 1)**. My practice combines the divergent traditions of independent animation and experimental film, as well as using digital tools in unusual ways. My Creative Development Grant allowed me to create a visual "proof" of something that could not be conveyed in words. This first section describes historical, artistic, and technical traditions that inform my work, followed by an explanation of the submitted demonstration video, which shows what my proposed film will be like. The second section is a Treatment that attempts to describe and explain the envisioned film, in reference to that demonstration tape. The Treatment also describes the working process needed to make the proposed film feasible.

My Practice: Experimental Animation

> *Animation's ability to instantly dissolve the representational into the abstract, to leap associatively with ease, and to render simultaneously a flood of images, perceptions, and perspectives, make it an unparalleled form of cinema.*
>
> —Tom McSorely

I practice experimental filmmaking in the tradition of Norman McLaren, emphasising fine-art animation made with digital tools. I work in an idiom referred to by names such as abstract cinema, graphic choreography, or visionary film. This is a diverse art form that has existed since the origin of cinema and modern art.

Independent animation

Independent animation is like fine art in the traditional sense, not narrative, not cartoon—"animation that reflects other aspects of our lives, other options, other points of view, ways of living life" (Martin Rose). It's "drawn up" from scratch rather than captured from the world around us. It's an *art of time*: "Animation is the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames" (McLaren). It's therefore extremely painstaking—for example, *Transfigured* (Item 2) took three years for one person to animate five minutes of screen time.

Experimental film

"The rich and vibrant Canadian experimental film tradition continues to both construct and detonate images in order to investigate what is present and, perhaps, illuminate what is absent" (Tom McSorley, *Take One*). In particular, the modes of experimental filmmaking that relate most to my work are those that deal with altered frames of reference, and as Sitney described it, "propose modes of camera movement as models of cognition" (e.g. *Wavelength, La Region Centrale*).

A synthesis

One could say that independent animation is about total control of space and time, direct creation, tightly choreographed, laboriously executed. In contrast, experimental film is about new ways of seeing what is already there, more indirect and freer in its execution. My approach for this project is a unique combination of both of these practices. On another level, because of digital

tools, the distinction between real-time film and animation is disappearing; they are becoming understood as two sides of the same coin.

Experimental bitmap animation

The practice of direct, frame-by-frame manipulation of the form of 2D pixel-based images over time is more akin to traditional cel, cut-out, paint, and cameraless animation methods than it is to the methods of its more famous digital cousin, 3D computer animation (which is more like live-action filmmaking). Bitmap animation in general (as exemplified by Item 2, *Transfigured*) remains an experimental form, and is not widespread. My films in the last decade have pioneered filmmaking by these means, but there are still few other examples by other animators. Possible examples include: Ruth Lingford's *Death and the Mother*, Gail Thomas' *Quilt*, John Weldon's *Scant Sanity*, Gail Noonan's *Menopause Song*, and the real-time creations of Jean Detheaux.

"Re-visioning"

Transformations of context and visual/spatial relationships have been at the core of my work since 1970. Their value is perhaps best expressed by other voices:

> *Stephen Arthur's new film is a good example of films that help us re-see the world.*
> —Holly Willis, Res Magazine, 2000

> *Stephen Arthur's meticulously rendered still-photo animation photographs mountain ranges from the highway so that their relative position and size in the frame is maintained to reveal nothing short of a new way of seeing.*
> —Alex McKenzie, Vancouver Underground Film Festival, 2000

> *I am astonished by how Stephen Arthur has, by a kind of psycho-chemistry, penetrated the very image-making process which I have developed in my painting, to produce exactly its dynamic complexity... it is this sensitive empathy to its true character which will make this an example of lasting referential relevance in the training of those filmmakers whose intention is to deal interpretively with the work of artists.*
> —Jack Shadbolt

> *...there is no question that it is Arthur who is the artist here... The way in which Arthur has projected himself into the life of the painted forms imaginatively and given them a dramatic narrative in the film medium is truly remarkable and original.*
> —Doris Shadbolt, former senior curator and associate director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, recipient of the Order of Canada, co-founder of the Vancouver Institute for the Visual Arts, and author of books on Emily Carr and Bill Reid

Historical Influences and Formal Aspects

In the fine-art animation tradition

Jules Engel (winner of the McLaren Award) calls his abstract animated films "graphic choreography," an example of which I made while a science undergraduate (*Anizen*, 1975) *prior* to attending film school. My new digital works of the 1990s still have more in common with non-digital contemporary film animators such as Joan Gratz (*Mona Lisa Descending a Staircase, Dowager's Feast*, USA), Michael Salkeld (*Heavy Stock*, UK), Sarah Petty (*Furies*, USA), Karen Aqua (*Ground Zero/Sacred Ground*, USA), Larry Jordan (*Orb*, USA), David Ehrlich (*Robot Redux*, USA), Skip Battaglia (*Geologic Time*, USA), Leif Marcussen (*Public Voice*, Denmark), Paul Glabiki (USA), Thomas Renolder (Austria), Inger Lise Hanson (UK/Netherlands), and in British Columbia: Richard Reeves (*Linear Dreams*), Ruben Moller (*Theta)*, and Scott Clark (*Headdress*). Eastern Canadian abstract animators include Pierre Hebert, Rene Jodoin, Jacque Drouin, Gayle Thomas, and the late Clorinda Warny (*Premier Jours*). However, commonality for me with other computer-based animators is rare. They include dance-informed Leslie Bishko (*Gasping for Air*, B.C.), Gayle Thomas (*Quilt*), 3D surrealist John McCormick in Australia, and the latest work of Rene Jodoin (*Between Time and Place*). Historical

influences include Norman McLaren, Mary Ellen Bute, Oscar Fischinger, Len Lye, Harry Smith, James Whitney, and Jordan Belson.

Roots in '70s avant-garde cinema

It may be important to note that I received a 1978 Canada Council Film Production Grant for an experimental "frame of reference" film, *Splitstream,* before I went to film school. For this film I invented a means of post-synchronisation to create an "impossible" simultaneous viewing of two contrasting points of view: an objective long shot following a character, and a handheld POV of the same character in the same scene—a unique use of horizontal split screen, which I understand predated Bruce Elder's use of split screen in *The Art of Worldly Vision*, 1979.

I see *Splitstream* (1978) as a prelude to Chris Gallagher's *Undivided Attention* (1983-1987), a film that further explored frames of reference through innovative camera positioning, movement, and manipulation. *Splitstream* also used long takes in order to encourage concentrated attention (as in the films of Ellie Epp).

Only one year later, 1979, I proposed to the Canada Council a film that was essentially the essence of the present proposal *Tran Scan.* It was cross-country time-lapse in stabilised telephoto using a non-animated, real-time shooting method that relied on building a specialised gyroscope device. So *Tran Scan* (the original name from 1979) belongs firmly in this mode of filmmaking. It is at home especially among those experimental landscape films described by Bart Testa in *Spirit in the Landscape*, 1989.

Splitstream used technical innovations to portray subject/object dualism. Similarly, the proposed film *Tran Scan* deals with subject/object duality, but in this case the landscape is the focus.

Cross-country time-lapse: a new method

Time-lapse cinematography is a familiar artistic device (e.g., *Koyaanisqatsi*, Mettler's *Picture of Light*, Rimmer's *Narrows Inlet*). But cross-country, travelling time-lapse has rarely been used effectively. Rare examples include a purposely disorienting and jarring effect by Al Razutis in *The Wasteland and Other Stories* (1976), Phil Hopper's abstracted action-painting with light trails in *Speed* (1980), and recent use as narrative connecting shots in Susanne Horizon-Fransel's *Flight of the Stone* (Germany, 1999), which are brief and depend on a low rate of time-lapse. The effect as commonly used has always been hard on the viewer.

But this technical and artistic problem has now been solved. This proposal, *Tran Scan*, hinges on an innovative (and laborious) means of filmmaking. Here an unprecedented experience can be created by a well-conceived "reframing" of the old, ineffective cross-country time-lapse technique, a technique that until now remained essentially undeveloped.

Perhaps the most important thing to appreciate is how radically the bulk of each frame changes in a regular, wide-angle, cross-country time-lapse road film. There is no trackable reference point for viewing, and most of the frame surrounding the zigzagging vanishing point becomes visual garbage. The crucial work for the proposed film is the animated stabilisation of radically squashed perspective, which turns the frenetic imagery into a smoothly viewable experience.

Pixilation: the uncanny object

> *Pixilation is a type of movement rather than a class of objects; and the effect of a process of perceiving rather than of an image perceived.* —Robyn Ferrell

> *Humans become like objects or automata in a mechanical process... but pixilation can also humanise the universe of inanimate objects.* —Roger Noake

What *Tran Scan* proposes is a form of pixilation. Pixilated means literally "affected by the pixies" (1848, from *pixy-led*: bewitched). Classic examples are Norman McLaren's *Neighbours* (1952) and *A Chairy Tale* (1957). Modern examples are Velcrow Ripper's *Leave Me Alone Don't Ever*, Inger Lise Hanson's *House*, David

Anderson's *Door*, Silke Parzich's *Spring*, many of Svankmajer's subjects, Mati Kutt's *Underground*, and the Bolex Brothers' *The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb*. As explained by Maureen Furniss in *Art in Motion*, 1998:

> *Pixilation is a technique that closely borders on live-action practice, although it clearly falls within the realm of animation. Whereas clay and puppet animators move inanimate objects incrementally before a camera and shoot them frame by frame, the pixilation animator shoots 'live' objects frame by frame... Time-lapse photography is a related technique, the major difference being that pixilation is associated with 'enacted' scenes while time-lapse deals with naturally occurring phenomena.*

These two related techniques occur simultaneously in *Vision Point* (Item 1) because the animated moving camera and squashed perspective makes the inanimate landscape into an 'actor'.

The Creative-Development Tests **(Item 1 - Support Material tape)**

Need for the test films

> *Exploring film technique cannot be dissociated from artistic creation.*
>
> —Pierre Hebert

Because I make technically-innovative visionary films, I often must produce a prototype film before its merit is recognised. In order to prove the merit of animating Shadbolt's paintings, I had to spend a year producing the first third of the film without funding. The resulting independent film was released and well received at festivals, and within six months I sold it to the NFB in a commission to extend the film (*Transfigured* - Item 2).

The Program of Work for my Canada Council Creative Development Grant in Media Arts, awarded in 1999, was an integrated cluster of five original investigations (completed in 2000). They were designed as sequential stages of research to develop both artistic vision and new filmmaking techniques. Each stage resulted in a tiny prototype test animation that stands on its own. The work sequence started with a new way of seeing the landscape and developed toward more subjective and abstract investigations of perception. The proposal, results, pictures, and clips are published on my web site at: `mypage.direct.ca/w/writer/Current.html`, and on my Animation World Network Affiliate Animator's Gallery at `showcase.awn.com`.

Results

The proposed *Tran Scan* project is based on the visible test results of parts one and two of my Creative Development work (which comprise Item 1). The test results from Part One were assembled into an extended short film, *Vision Point*, which proved to be well-received at film festivals. These development tests are summarised briefly below:

Part 1. Vision Point:

These tests (as compiled into a one-minute film) demonstrate a novel method using travelling time-lapse footage shot in super-telephoto with a 35-mm still camera, which is then strategically reframed, frame-by-frame, to track close-up on a distant landscape point. This eliminates the swerving and jitter, and creates an unprecedented experience. These were very cheap tests for an envisioned possible film called *Tran Scan* that could travel the Trans Canada Highway completely across Canada yet remain viewable, even beautiful, in smoothly flowing continuity.

The tool of choice today is a high-resolution digital still camera and automated stabilisation software. At the time of the test, digital cameras could not download fast enough, the software was not available, and both were too expensive. Now hi-res digital cameras are capable and affordable. I also now have two different professional software tools that can perform stabilising, but tests show they still cannot handle the bulk of the work in this case—*it's still essentially hand-made animation*.

Part 2. Landscape Painting Transformations

These animated morphing "sketches" present an appropriation of a range of styles, from a wide range of painters, over a range of locations and decades, informed by travel and the *Vision Point* tests. They develop a new vision by exploring the evolution of landscape painting through history and across the country—a "meta-vision" of Canadian artists and land, similar to what I did for Jack Shadbolt's work. The videotape of ***Vision Point II*** (2 min.) demonstrates sequential morphing cycles from realist to abstract in different regions, driven by heartbeats to express the artist's drive to grapple with the vast and harsh Western Canadian landscape.

Artist Statement for Vision Point

I used travelling time-lapse in a novel way to obtain an "impossible" view of the landscape across Western Canada (Ontario to BC). On one level it's an expressionist portrait using motion as a medium to bring out regional differences in a new way. On a second level it conveys the ambivalence of human domination of the land contrasted with our ephemeral buzzing around it. On a third level it's the union of observer and observed, the landscape inseparable from our view of it. The artist's body becomes the land's motion, so that in the off-road section the flowing, hopping, and vibration of the landscape is simply due to the height of my body, or a couple of my strides. It's an intimate relativity as you realise that you have become an integral part of the landscape in the act of creating a perception of it. *(from Artropolis 2001)*.

Reception to the test films

I received a Canada Council Travel Grant to present at the Ottawa 00 International Animation Festival the results of my Creative Development work, including a workshop, panels, and screenings.

Vision Point generated considerable interest. It screened in various exhibitions and festivals, including: *Artropolis 2001* exhibition of contemporary art in BC (curated section); "*Frozen Moments*: *Implications of the Digital Revolution on Independent Animation in Canada"*—films and panel discussion presented by Quickdraw Animation Society at Indep. Film/Video Alliance AGM, Edmonton; the Cinematheque Ontario "Independents" series; Canadian Film Centre's *World-wide Short Film Festival*; the *Northwest Film and Video Festival* (USA); the *Ottawa '00 International Animation Festival*; *Resfest Digital Film Festival* ; *Planet in Focus: Toronto Environmental Film and Video Festival*; *Black Maria Film & Video Festival*; and Canadian animation retrospective, Casa da Animacao, Portugal, curated by Marco de Blois.

Vision Point II (paintings tests) was not generally circulated because of copyright, but it did show in competition at *Ottawa '00* and received spontaneous praise from various audience members, as well as from students at the Vancouver Film School during a guest lecture. (The NFB also showed a passing interest in developing a schools-oriented website around it.)

Artistic Intention of "Tran Scan"

The "garrison mentality"

I believe that both my early film *Splitstream* and the proposed film *Tran Scan* deal with the experience of the land in a mode similar to David Rimmer's time-lapse films *Canadian Pacific* (1974) and *Narrows Inlet* (1980), and Jim Anderson's *Moving Bicycle Picture* (1975). These films are evaluated by Testa in *Spirit in the Landscape*, 1989, in terms of the Canadian landscape-painting tradition and its accompanying "garrison mentality"—a refuge from the vast threatening landscape. It's therefore a good time for this "experimental documentary" on the Canadian landscape because we may be at a pivotal point in the garrison mentality, where it is now the landscape that is threatened by the garrison.

A celebration and a memorial

> *Our movies mark the passage of time, they are time machines, machines built for*

mourning, and in some moments they are much of what stands between us and our need to obliterate everything, our need to begin again, to wipe the slate clean. There are two kinds of terror here, the terror of annihilation and the terror of remembering. Which will we find more painful? Or more seductive? —Mike Hoolboom,

While *Tran Scan* could be seen as a structuralist exercise, I see it as a sensual, aesthetic, motivated, human-centred passage, intensely focused on its subject, the modern landscape, provoking a feeling of wonder like in Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light.* In contrast to *Transfigured*, the proposed *Tran Scan* film would not be designed to control the time, space, and experience of the viewer as much as it is designed to allow us to move through the landscape in a more contemplative, transcendent, open frame of reference.

The theme expressed in the *Vision Point* tests will be naturally extended by the painting transformation cycles indicated by *Vision Point II*, as pointed out by Maija Martin, curator at Artropolis 2001 contemporary art exhibition in Vancouver: "Rather than interpreting the landscape as subject matter, *Vision Point* suggests that it is a blank canvas on which artists project their experiences in attempts to tame it."

In a complementary way, I hope that the "time-lapse road-trip" parts will have something in common with the long-gaze approach of Ellie Epp (*Trapline*), as opposed to the more "painterly" overt manipulation of the image by the film auteur. People should come away from it seeing the land differently, just as I have come to see it from immersion in geological time scales (past development for NFB).

Reframing and re-timing—changing the scales of things in space and time—these can help reveal something deeper. This is where the tradition of pixilation comes into play. While *Tran Scan* is a kind of post-processing, hand-made manipulation, it's more importantly a kind of *staging*. In this sense it will be a kind of dance that transforms the mundane into the extraordinary.

The intention is not to pander to the viewer's feeling of omniscience or create a spectacle, but to "give centre stage to what's in front of you" as Ellie Epp describes her minimalist long-take work—but now on a radically different scale of time and space. At least I hope to lean in that direction as far as I can in this context.

Expanding this Practice

In 2000, producer Michael Fukushima at the National Film Board in Montreal wanted to commission me to apply the *Vision Point* method to people, to try to visually evoke a *Rashamon*-style ambivalence of interpretation. This included a proposed "re-interpreting" of a classic NFB cinema-verite documentary through visual "re-centering." The commission fell through, but it emphasised that I was on to something. I see it as being analogous to the photographic work of fine artist David Hockney. For *Pearblossom Highway* he shot hundreds of close-up photos from different perspectives and created a collage to fashion a single, panoramic view. Hockney said in an *American Cinematographer* interview: "The attraction of the collaged picture, in a way, is that you are pulled into it. You are actually inside it, moving around."

In 2001, I took this practice further by applying it to the city of Vancouver in a 15 second speculative-commercial spot for a director's showreel, to demonstrate applied art (*Blind Man,* 2001). It took 8 weeks to make, and is published in small size on my website. This shows my commitment to trying to develop a professional career based on this "specialty" style of POV animation, landscape pixilation, or "virtual cinematography."

Stephen Arthur: *"Tran Scan"* film/video production
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (2002)
Section 2:

Treatment

(experimental project)

Description

The demonstration videotape (Vision Point I & II)

A Canada Council *Creative Development Grant* in Media Arts (1999) funded my development of this test material to prove the viability of this proposed project. This "prototype" animation on tape (Item 1) is central to this proposal, so the following text is in reference to that tape. The demo has two very different parts, which will be combined in the proposed film. Below I will describe part one and then part two, before describing how they will be expanded and elaborated into the full proposed film. Lastly I describe the means and materials to make feasible the proposed full-length film, *Tran Scan*. In this project the technical means and the treatment are largely inseparable.

Vision Point (landscape pixilation - 1 minute)

Consider that you're travelling at 6,000 kilometres per hour while looking through binoculars that fixate on a distant point. Impossible to capture with normal time-lapse cinematography, our view is stabilised and made watchable by "re-animating" the raw frames. Each frame is exactly what was shot, with no artificial layering, just drastically cropped. The land becomes alive in a way not seen before. Although the speed of time-lapse travel is 6,000 kilometres per hour, *it doesn't seem that fast because it's so zoomed in*.

Each individual frame of *Vision Point* was shot in sequence with a *still camera* (Pentax 35mm). No actual "footage" existed until the hundreds of scanned frames were strung together in Adobe After Effects, each frame given a unique "anchor point" that targeted the same background object from frame to frame. Animation occurred first in the shooting, then again in the computer. The following quote from *RES Magazine* writer Holly Willis may help explain:

> *Arthur ended up with around 500 images, which he scanned and then brought back into motion in After Effects. However, rather than merely making still pictures move, Arthur adopted a new technique. "Each shot is given an anchor point," he explains, "so there's a spot on the landscape that is always in the same place. The framing is moving around afterward to follow that part of the land, not of the screen. The background is fixed, and the foreground is going crazy, but it's watchable because you have a reference point." Arthur is right—you see the image, but there's a kinetic motion that makes most of the frame still jostle about energetically as it does in any pixilated sequence.*

Each two-second shot in the first half of *Vision Point* is simply one 36-exposure roll of film from the second phase of short tests made while travelling from Western Ontario to Vancouver on the Trans Canada Highway.

In earlier test "footage" (not shown) I created a single unbroken shot of 22 seconds, which showed what to avoid in the later tests. Initially I shot a long sequence from Vancouver to Chilliwak using two cameras in a relay to obtain ten rolls in unbroken sequence (covering 36 km uncut). For this I added several artificial pans at turns in the road. I also added artificial motion

blur of foreground objects, plus some drift and pan of the anchor point. All of this simulated a more normal camera movement. But it now looked far too normal; it didn't bring out what I was looking for. I needed to restrict it to a totally locked, straight ahead view, and keep it without normal motion blur (as in pixilation—see "Underlying Concepts").

20 seconds looped and extended:

Vision Point is *really only 20 seconds total* of test material—brief clips *repeated several times* each to aid attention and to extend it into something to screen for audiences and critical reaction. The last third of this film is just *looping single frames*. It also takes the technique to an extreme, creating a different feeling than what has been envisioned all along for the larger, "gentler," full film proposed here (*Tran Scan*).

Regional expression:

This simple yet novel technique creates an expression, or an abstraction, of the differing land regions, conveyed entirely through the unique relative motion produced from each region's interplay between camera and land (or viewer). The prototype travels westward across Western Canada from Ontario (opening blurred shot, impossible to fix on anything), Manitoba (mirror), Saskatchewan, Alberta, to BC, and each area has its own inherent feeling, brought out by this technique. The Ontario shot, for example, was blurred (purposeful motion blur through shutter speed) and very erratic because the winding road with close trees captures only momentary breaks across lakes in marshy land. The motion reflects the geography.

Vision Point II (transforming paintings)

Vision Point II is not a film but a demonstration, set of sketches, or animatics made with very rough-and-ready, single-layer morphing methods using low-level software. The image quality of the morphing in the proposed film, *Tran Scan*, will be comparable to *Transfigured* (Item 2), my NFB film on 35mm. However, the morphing will remain simple and straightforward compared to the intricacies seen in *Transfigured*, where components were painstakingly separated, reconstructed, and morphed separately. *Transfigured* took three full years to animate, so the morphing proposed here must be simpler to keep time and cost down, but this will be sufficient and appropriate for this context.

Each sequence focuses on one geographical region and moves from realist to abstract. In the Creative Development work, I realised that the historical progression toward abstraction was the only structure that could give it a direction. This expressed more clearly the fundamental striving of the artists. I had deliberately focused on "pure landscape" by selecting out all pictures that focused too much on bodies of water, close-up objects like trees, human presence, etc. This then tended to highlight the "threatening" landscape of Western Canada (as described historically), void of places for human refuge. I saw that the subjective drive of the painters themselves became the primary meaning, not the object itself, and thus the cycles of progressive abstraction driven by the human heart beat emerged as inevitable. (This perspective was then applied to *Vision Point I* also).

Although I worked with hundreds of paintings, the need to find affinities of both colour and form reduced the viable choices to very few, so that cobbling together a true "mini-film" (like *Vision Point*) was not possible at that stage.

Structure of the proposed film ("Tran Scan")

About 80% will be the pixilated telephoto time-lapse road-trip. The proportion of footage from each different geographic region will reflect as close as possible the literal proportions of the land, as experienced when crossing it. Brief passages through cities will also be included (5-10 sec).

Longer shots, not repeated:

Tran Scan will be continuous forward movement (or partial circling around) sequentially across Canada from Atlantic to Pacific. By using a

more sophisticated method based on detailed contour maps (see below), I hope to attain continuous or apparently continuous shots of 12 seconds or longer, as opposed to the two to three second shots of the *Vision Point* tests. Shots will be joined smoothly in editing by many mini-dissolves, and not repeated. While *Tran Scan* may be only ten minutes in total, the shots will not be repeated, so that the film will actually be ***30 times longer*** than *Vision Point* in terms of unique material.

Widescreen:

Using the 1.78 DVD widescreen aspect ratio will convey a more stable and balanced image, and allow more of the road and sky to be cut out—less distracting, more focused attention on the large-scale (i.e., distant brought close) landscape. This will have a considerably different feel from the *Vision Point* road trip, which was deliberately framed lower to bring out the contrast between the road and the distance (the frantic, ephemeral human activity buzzing around the stable, eternal landscape).

Pixilation and morphs intercut in sequence:

The East to West sequence replays the migration of settlers and the history of painters encountering the wild and unfamiliar North American landscape. The photographic pixilation (time-lapse) footage will lead into the painting morph cycles from the same geographical region—progressing from representational to abstract (historical progression)—then returning to the pixilation to move further across the country and replay the photographic-to-painting juxtaposition in each new region, in sequence across the country. The two parts thus naturally fit together to depict "a canvas on which artists project their experiences in attempts to tame it" (Maija Martin, Artropolis 2001 review of *Vision Point*).

The transition from pixilated photographic scene to painting morphs is illustrated at the start of *Vision Point II* using moving time-lapse footage of Lake Louise and several paintings of this site. Another mountain in *Vision Point I* was chosen on location to match the painting *Trans Canada No 1* by Arthur Horsfal, 1973. The two parts were not put together as one film for screening because the lack of image rights would have prevented the chance to get a public reaction to the moving-time-lapse landscape-pixilation part.

Hand-painted hand-animated transitions:

Using Discreet *paint** I can briefly paint through time over the photographic landscape pixilation with animated brush strokes in a way similar to rotoscoping (*Waking Life*). That way I can build up to the painted image so as to produce a transition that draws the viewer into the act of the artist: the desire to express something of the wonder of this landscape experience.

Human rhythm:

The rhythm of the painting-transformation segments may sometimes *stumble* (or even have a brief "heart attack"), possibly gasping for breath. This may comment ambiguously at various levels—such as the possible hubris of the need to transform, or the notion of the "death of painting." But at the same time it will be heroic and deeply sympathetic, with humour. Humour always creeps into art when it starts to move, and my work with *Vision Point* showed me that I should not try to avoid humour if it is legitimately inherent in the work that emerges.

Diversity of painters:

My goal is to include a multicultural range of artists across time periods, ethnic groups, and gender. For example, the *Vision Point II* demonstration includes paintings by native Dene painter Alex Janvier, Japanese-Canadian painters Kazuo Nakamura and Takao Tanabe, and female painters Marion Nicoll and Maureen Enns, as well as the Group of Seven, etc.

I already have collected a large range of candidate images (and possible sequences between them) from the Canada Council Creative Development grant Work Program already funded and completed.

Working Process

On location

- **Method to obtain non-looped shots six times longer than the demo:** My goal is to find the longest, smoothest shots I can, but the tests show harsh limitations due to road curvature, even in the prairies. Navigation is more disorienting than one might think when hunting for distant imagery at ground-level in long telephoto. Even a very slight road curve and incline throws it off unpredictably. The solution is to pre-plan carefully with detailed maps to pick the most useful distant features in preselected regions, where shooting can be picked up again after temporarily lost, knowing that I can wait for ten kilometres or so and then resume, pointed toward that same feature. In this way a longer segment can be constructed that may appear continuous, by brief dissolves where the long gaps in viewing occurred. Under such controlled circumstances, this kind of time lapse material may look continuous even with a straight cut joining the sections.
- **Maps:** Government topographic maps on CD-ROM are the tool of choice because they combine both 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 scales. They also allow me to navigate seamlessly and continuously between maps, quickly locate the place I'm looking for, measure travel distances and azimuths, and print out my own maps. The selected eleven CD-ROM packages in the budget cost $770, whereas equivalent paper maps covering only the Trans Canada Highway would cost $3,000 (187 maps). Saskatchewan and Manitoba are not available on the CD-ROMs, so a mix of small and large scale topo maps on paper are needed here.
- **Rented converted camper-van:** Drive as before with Joyce Arthur as driver, a proven reliable team that made the *Vision Point* test, leaving the van in Halifax and flying back to Vancouver.
- **Clearing cars from view:** This is much more of a problem than it may appear from the tests. Traffic that looks sparse in normal view is a major feature to contend with in telephoto views with erratic (time-lapse) motions: right in your face and very distracting. Ways to minimise this include (1) being higher up in the camper van rather than a small car as before, (2) shoot stationary as needed, wait for traffic to clear, and (3) digital car removal afterwards, which was done extensively in the first test film (not shown) as well as in *Vision Point I*.
- **High-resolution digital still camera:** Shoot selected parts at roughly 5-second intervals, using ten memory cards,. The high resolution is needed for cropping, the same reason for using the 35mm still camera for the tests; a standard video or 16mm camera is not adequate for cropping (i.e., blow-up). (Hand-held proved better than tripod; no motion blur due to a faster shutter speed than film.).
- **Download images to a laptop computer** from memory cards (2048 by 1536 pixels, 800 KB each).
- **Store images with CD burner:** Image sequences saved on CD-ROM with a CD burner connected to the laptop—approximately 25 CDs needed in total (about 15 gigabytes). This method also avoids all the unnecessary time and pain of film that I dealt with for the tests, including filtering of negative-scanning dust artifacts and extensive colour correction because of the incapacity of the one-hour photo printing service. Keeping it digital from start to finish will save a tremendous amount of time and grief.

Processing/animating

Software:

I provide two top professional image processing, compositing, and animating software packages, Adobe *After Effects 5* Production Bundle, and Discreet Logic *paint**, as well as *PhotoShop 5* and various shareware morphing programs (*MorphMan* and *WinMorph*). Using the professional morphing software Avid *Elastic Reality* would have been preferred, but could not be included in this tight budget, and I have made

do in the past with these consumer-level morphing tools. They will be adequate for the simple morphing proposed here. The morphing of paintings will be the relatively quick and easy part of this project.

Footage ratios:

I have planned and budgeted for a shooting ratio of 3:1. This includes processing and animating 2/3 of the raw images photographed, leaving a 2:1 ratio for editing. This will allow much more artistic choice for editing, compared to the *Vision Point* material compiled in After Effects (no editor), where only about 1/3 of the photos were processed, and *all* of the processed material was included in the film.

Efficient animating:

Producing *Vision Point* took about three months, not including the earlier long-shot test not shown (two months). The twenty seconds of animation in *Vision Point* took about an hour per frame (scanned from negatives and prints) to "process" into useable footage. Now I have the approach down pat, and I have even had further practice with this method by applying it in new ways to the city of Vancouver in my most recent piece (*Blind Man* 2001, which can be viewed on my internet website). Now, with experience and digital methods in place, I estimate we should be able to accomplish a rate of 5-10 minutes work per frame. This is much more efficient, but is *still the main part of the work time for the project*.

Help from automated tracking software:

Also factored into this estimate is the help of automatic tracking/stabilising functions that I now have available in the Adobe *After Effects 5* Production Bundle, and in Discreet Logic *paint**. Unfortunately, the majority of this image processing is likely to be beyond the capabilities of even these professional programs to handle feasibly, so the majority of the work remains to be "hand-done." The time estimate cannot be modified, whatever mix is finally used. Computer animation professionals may understandably believe that this whole process can be done automatically, but my own tests with my frame sequences showed this to be too taxing for the recognition ability of this professional software to identify the stabilising point from frame to frame. It gets thrown off so often that the manual adjustments needed make the process no faster than doing it manually by eye for most of the sequences. However, the shooting will be constrained as much as possible to make it easier for the trackers to function properly. For example, by keeping a prominently coloured or contrasty distant feature point within a small area during shooting, and shooting during constant light conditions (not moving clouds). That way it may be possible to do more of the "re-animation" semi-automatically, in which case I'll obtain more footage in the same work time, allowing a longer film.

The paintings

Gather a large number of image rights first—*then* choose a few to use:

I learned from the test morphing in Part Two of my Creative Development Program of Work that a large number of landscape painting images must be accumulated in order to find fitting relationships, on the order of a 20:1 ratio, because of the need to find affinities of both colour and form. It would be a big mistake to plan the image sequences before obtaining permissions for those chosen, which of course cannot be guaranteed. I will instead *first* collect permissions for a very large set of paintings, several hundred. The final choices (of something like 20-30 paintings) will come from those I know I have permission to use. This way there is no risk of failing to obtain rights needed. This process will also allow me to view and amass far more paintings than I have already compiled in books and exhibitions.

A single permission letter from a single source may provide rights to an entire body of work. This means there should be plenty of permitted images to work with. Since it was not feasible to go through this time-consuming process before proposing this film project (in order to try to include image-rights permission documents with the proposal), I therefore must include a "research component" in the production budget.

Please understand that this is *not a risk*. This covers only the time needed to communicate with artists and galleries. [***Note:*** It is possible to include a research segment in a production project, as announced by Media Arts Section Head David Poole in the Summary Report on the IFVA Canada Council Roundtable, Ottawa, June 6th 2001.]

Artist and gallery contribution:

The time is budgeted to contact a large range of artists and galleries to compile available landscape painting images and obtain co-operation and permissions to use these images in the film. Judging from my experience animating the paintings of Jack Shadbolt in *Touched Alive* and *Transfigured* (1994-1998), of Desmond Morris in *Hybrid Vigour* (1993), and of Peter Voormeij in *Fall Forward Spring Back* (2000, collaboration), I can reasonably assume that there are many artists and/or galleries willing to permit me to use their images for this purpose. For example, the rights to the above-mentioned Horsfal painting were spontaneously offered, unsolicited, from viewing the website information on these tests. In the case of Jack Shadbolt's lifelong body of work, the only contract needed by the National Film Board to cover all image rights for the film *Transfigured* was from the single copyright holder, Jack Shadbolt himself. Photographer's copyright does not apply in these cases of non-creative reproductions.

Easy image access:

I do not need access to the original paintings themselves, only reproductions in book size, or on negatives, slides, or pre-scanned digital images (which can easily be sent over the internet). Most paintings will have already been photographed or scanned. Most of the images of Shadbolt's paintings used for *Transfigured* were simply scanned from books, with a minority supplied on negatives and slides by the gallery and the artist. Many of the images are therefore readily available without any additional action by the galleries or artists, beyond their written permission.

Editing

I plan on a 2:1 ratio and standard offline editing with a professional editor, instead of trying to do it all myself in very non-real time with the compositing software, as I had to do before. This will allow freer artistic selection and better judgement of selections, pacing, composition, and motion design, as well as the most seamless possible transitions throughout. Depending on how it works out artistically, we may be able to keep much more than half the footage and arrive at a longer film. The main thing is that I need the option of discarding footage in editing, as in live-action filmmaking—a rarity for animators.

Sound Treatment

The soundtrack will be akin to the one for *Transfigured*, on which I was sound designer, and which received a BC Leo Award for Best Musical Score (commissioned and directed by me). I believe this justifies faith in my ability to create a soundtrack that will match the quality of the film. I want to rely on a music composer to be brought in after editing is complete, plus including sound effects (perhaps brush strokes and breathing during painting morphing). It is common practice in non-dialogue animation to create all sound after the picture is locked, which is how I made *Transfigured*.

DVD format

With the exception of film festivals and occasional filler on cable television, some might say that the short film has become little more than a calling card for aspiring feature filmmakers. But now with DVD it may be time for the short film to make a commercial comeback in the form of compilations. Early attempts by distributors to put shorts on videocassettes were understandably unsuccessful. It was a frustrating, time-consuming process to find a particular film while trying to skip over the ones that didn't interest you. DVD technology allows a viewer the freedom to swiftly navigate the choices. In addition, the DVD's higher-resolution and widescreen format will soon be prevalent as a

screening format, and will have longevity in coming HDTV media.

Mastering to DVD and making copies is now relatively cheap and easy. I intend to include on my own self-distributed, promotional DVD the following supplementary material:

- "The Making Of" (optional)
- Director's commentary audio tracks.
- *STOCK FOOTAGE:* Discarded footage included as stock footage, for which rights might be licensed, accessed by geographic region.
- Description list of the *unprocessed* image sequences, listed by region, content, etc, which can be processed and supplied for a fee.

Career impact

I believe there are enough spin-off possibilities from this novel style of filmmaking that I may be able to establish a viable career focusing on them. For example:

- **Commissioned films,** or hired as a "**virtual cinematographer**": This DVD may attract commissions or jobs from other countries, agencies, or other sponsors who want the same kind of film, or just some footage, for other places around the world, most likely for promoting tourism. How about a north-south version (Arctic to Equator)? Or shot from trains, boats, aircraft, rafts, on foot, horseback, or RV across rugged terrain without roads?

- **Technology development:** It may be possible to develop (and even patent) a device that allows travelling time-lapse telephoto cinematography to be performed in real time. For example, gyroscopic stabilising—my original proposal from 20 years ago. There is still no product that can do this, including Steadicams and helicopter-cams. Similarly, it may be possible to develop software for processing and animating the stabilisation of forward-moving pixilated POVs in real time.

- **Licensing stock footage**.

Name of Applicant: **Stephen Arthur**
Grants to Film and Video Artists: Production Grants (2002)
Working title: *"Tran Scan"* (experimental)

PART B2 - WORK SCHEDULE (2002-2003)

Production:

Upon notification of grant: reserve Camper Van and order maps

September
week 1: Strategic planning of shots based on detailed topography
week 2: Setup, camera and laptop trial runs, rehearsal
weeks 3 and 4*: *Travel and shooting - drive Vancouver to Halifax (16 days)
Air flight return Halifax to Vancouver

Oct. - Jan.
Phase one: Process/animate
1. Director/filmmaker - setup, direct, perform, animate, colour-correct, etc
2. Processing/match-mover assistant works in parallel, own workstation provided, continues through phase two period

Phase two: Collect
Director and assistant together accumulate as many images as can be permitted in two person-months (including letters and scanning as required). Assistant continues into phase three period.

Jan. - Feb.
Phase three: Morphing (including selecting and arranging)
& Hand-painted animation
plus some pre-assembly of shots

Post-production:

March
Editing
Digital online suite for input from digital files; Offline with Editor 3 days

Sound (from locked picture)
Composer/musician/recorder
Sound record/edit and mix
Finishing: online to digital Betacam

April
DVD authoring
Duplication, promotion, launching

PART E2 – DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SUPPORT MATERIAL SUBMITTED

Item 1

Title: ***Vision Point I & II***

Applicant's credit/role (director, writer, etc.): Filmmaker

Production medium (video, film or new media): Video

Format of support material (16 mm, VHS, CD-ROM, etc.): VHS

Running time (where applicable): 3 minutes

Completion or recording date: 1999/2000

Synopsis:

Part I: I used a novel method of travelling time-lapse photography as a medium of expression to create a portrait of the Western Canadian landscape and our relationship to it, from the Ontario border to Vancouver. It unifies observer and observed: the artist's body becomes the land's motion; the jumping and flowing of the landscape in the off-road part is simply due to the height of my body, or a couple of my strides. It's an intimate relativity where you become an integral part of the landscape in the act of creating a perception of it.

Part II: Appropriation of landscape paintings used in sequential morphing cycles from realist to abstract in different regions across Western Canada—a "meta-vision" of Canadian artists and land, which starts transforming from the real photographic location on which Part I ended.

Brief description of how the support material relates to the proposed production project:

This tape is the VISUAL TREATMENT FOR MY PROPOSED PROJECT (*"Tran Scan"*). My 1999 *Canada Council Creative Development Grant in Media Arts* funded development of this test material to prove the viability of the project proposed in this application. This "prototype" is central to my proposal. The Treatment text depends on reference to this tape. There are two very different parts, which will be combined in the proposed film.

Special presentation instructions or notes:

If at all possible, please screen this 3-minute tape before reading the accompanying text. This demonstration is described first, as the basis for the proposed project.

PART E2 – DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SUPPORT MATERIAL SUBMITTED (cont'd)

Item 2

Title: ***Transfigured***

Applicant's credit/role (director, writer, etc.): Director, animator, associate producer, sound design

Production medium (video, film or new media): 35 mm film

Format of support material (16 mm, VHS, CD-ROM, etc.): 3/4" videotape

Running time (where applicable): 5 minutes

Completion or recording date: 1996/1998

Synopsis:

"...an astonishing celebration of Jack Shadbolt's paintings. In six minutes flat, the computer-aided animator brings 80 tableaux to wide-screen life, achieving a degree of plastic beauty previously obtained only by NFB superstar Norman McLaren."-- Mark Harris, *The Georgia Straight*, 1998

Starting production in 1995, I pushed to the extreme the limits of 2-D, paint-based, bitmap animation on a pre-Pentium PC—a technique resembling traditional cut-out, painting-on-glass, and cel animation. Much of the work was reconstructing the missing backgrounds behind the cut-out foreground objects. By using a causal chain of actions, and by matching forms and actions between paintings, it appears as though we are inside a contiguous environment, a surreal world made from Jack Shadbolt's paintings. The events are carefully choreographed in three- and four-second movement phrases, with corresponding sound effects, to help the viewer follow the fast flow of unusual transformations. Said Jack Shadbolt: "*I am astonished by how Stephen Arthur has, by a kind of psychochemistry, penetrated the very image making process which I have developed in my painting, to produce exactly its dynamic complexity."*

Brief description of how the support material relates to the proposed production project:

This is a previous professional, independent film; a polished film that best shows my cababilities, and for which I am most known—produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1998. (It may also be considered radically different from Item 1.)

Special presentation instructions or notes:

Name of Applicant: **Stephen Arthur**
Grants to Film and Video Artists: Production Grants (2002)

PART C2 - BUDGET SUMMARY

EXPENSES

Subsistence (during production and postproduction)

Applicant's subsistence $2000 per month x 6.4 months x one applicant
Breakdown of activities:

- Shooting (on location and preparation with maps)	1.0 month
- Process/animate (setup, direct, perform, color-correct, etc)	2.0 months
- Collecting images[1]	1.0 month
- Morphing (including selecting and arranging)	0.7 month
- Hand-painted animation sections	0.5 month
- Edit and sound (incl. assembly in After Effects)	0.7 month
- Promotion & launching	0.5 month
Subsistence subtotal	**$12,800**

Production:

Production crew			
Driver[2]	$1,200/week	2 weeks	$2,400
Processing/match-mover [includes own computer & software]	$3,632/month	3.3 months	$11,985
Image search, liaison, corresp, gather, scan	$3,500/month	1 month	$3,500
Production equipment rental			
Laptop computer (on location)[3]	$140/week	3 weeks	$420
CD writer (on location & backup, output)	$50/week	6 weeks	$300
Digital still camera (on location and prep.)[4]	$400/week	3 weeks	$1,200
Production workstation *(see donations)*	$440/month	5 months	$2,200
Travel			
Camper van rental[5]	$170/day	16 days	$2,720
One-way drop-off charge (Vancouver - Halifax)			$550
Extra mileage charge[6]			$430
Tax on van rental, preparation fee $55, & propane			$495
Gas (10 miles/gallon)	$0.60/litre	1700 litres	$1,020
RV hookups (average)	$33 each time	16	$500
Power inverter			$75
Airfare Halifax to Vanc. one-way, on Jetsgo[7]	$314.00	2 persons	$628
Airfare added fees (Nav-Ins Surcharge, GST, AIF, Security tax)			$207
Production materials and supplies			
Maps *(see explanation)*[8]			$870
CD-Rs 10 packs	$15/pack	4 packs	$60
Memory cards	$30/week x 10	3 weeks	$900
Card reader	$30/week	3 weeks	$90
Other			
Long-distance telephone			$85
Scanning			$200
Production subtotal			**$30,835**

Post-production:

Post-production personnel			
Editor	$350	3 days	$1,050
Editing[9]			
Digital online suite for input	$500/hr	3 hrs	$1,500
Offline suite	$350/day	3 days	$1,050
Online suite	$350/hr	2 hours	$700
Post-production materials and supplies			
Digital Betacam tape			$65
Sound			
Record and mix			$3,500
Music			
Composer/performer			$3,000
Promotional materials			
DVD replication	$1.25 each	100	$125
Betacam SP dubs			$100
VHS dubs	$4.00 each	50	$200
Printing			$225
Other			
DVD authoring[10]			$1,500
		Post-production subtotal	**$13,015**
	Contingency	1 % of $55,000	**$550**
		TOTAL EXPENSES	**$57,200**

REVENUES

Grant requested from the Canada Council for the Arts	**$55,000**
Donations	
Production equipment rental: production workstation	$2,200
Applicant's turnkey computer hardware and software system based on previous rental to National Film Board for services contract at $440/month x 5 months	
TOTAL REVENUES	**$57,200**

[1] Method and rationale in *Treatment: Working Process: the paintings*, pg 2-6
[2] Driver from *Vision Point* location shoot (Western Canada round trip, ten days - Joyce Arthur)
[3] Access Computer Rentals, PII, USB, 2 GB
[4] Leo's Cameras, *Canon PowerShot G2*, 2048 x 1536
[5] Blue Diamond Travel - Canadream Campers - Camper Van (class B motorhome) - most economical, versatile and manoeuvrable, customised van, self-contained facilities (cheaper than mini-van rental plus motels).
[6] 1,500 kilometres total over the daily rental amount (250 km/day) accumulated
[7] New airline, Jetsgo, now offers discount one-way fares (previously unavailable via Air Canada)
[8] Maps: Strategy for special method described in *Treatment - Working Process: On Location*, pg 2-4. Requires government topographic maps on eleven sets of CD-ROMs, which are less than a third the cost of paper ones and more versatile, plus addition paper topo maps for Saskatchewan and Manitoba (which are not available on CD-ROM). A whole week will be devoted to identifying viable shooting angles across Canada ahead of time, before starting the trip. (method arrived at by experience with earlier tests on location across Western Canada).
[9] Finale Editworks
[10] Rainmaker Digital Pictures