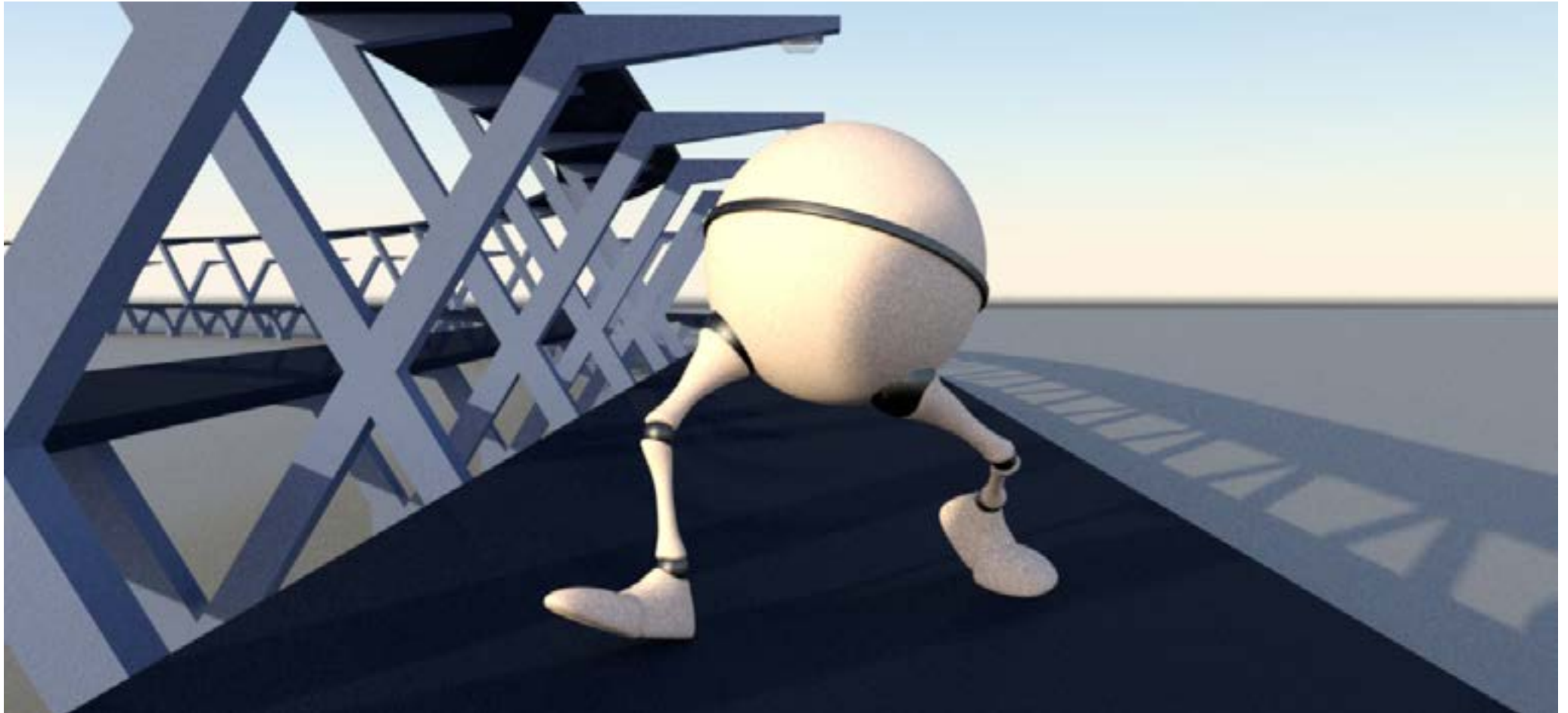


BILLY BOB THORNTON

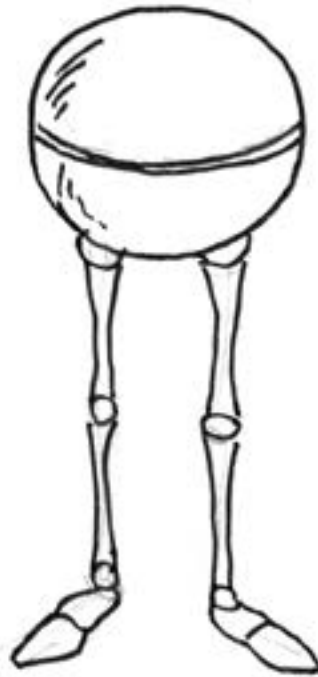
PRODUCTION NOTES and SELF-REFLECTION

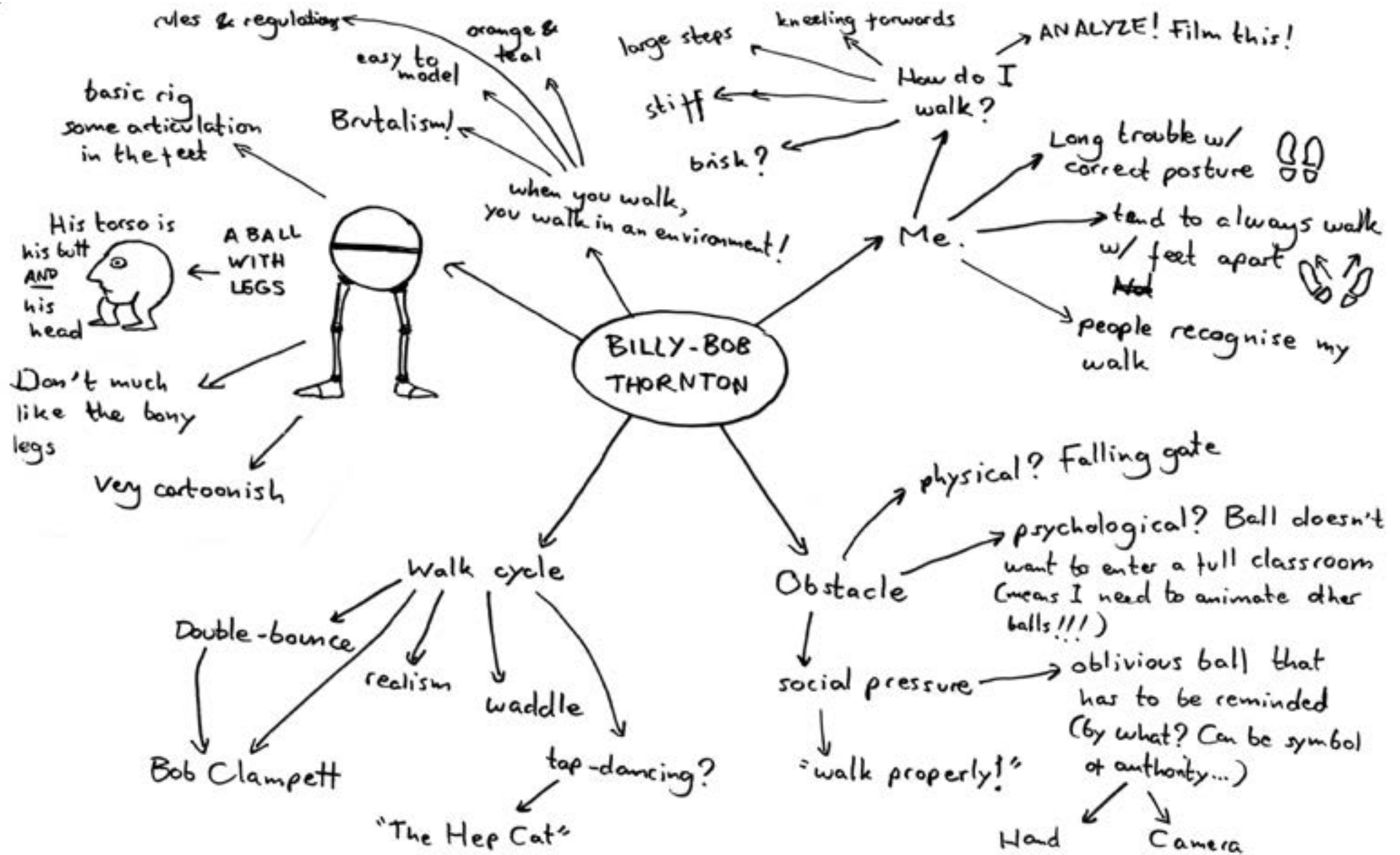


SOPHIE KAARS SIJPESTEIJN i7448495 2015

Conceptual Research summary - 16/11/2015

This assignment has two parts: the first part is to take a pre-made character (called Billy Bob Thornton) and animate a looping walk-cycle to it. The other part is to place this character in a situation where it encounters an obstacle (physical or psychological) that it has to try and find its way around with. So what can you do with a character that has no arms or head and only two legs?





The first narrative ideas - 16/11/2015

Obstacle:

First idea was a simple one.

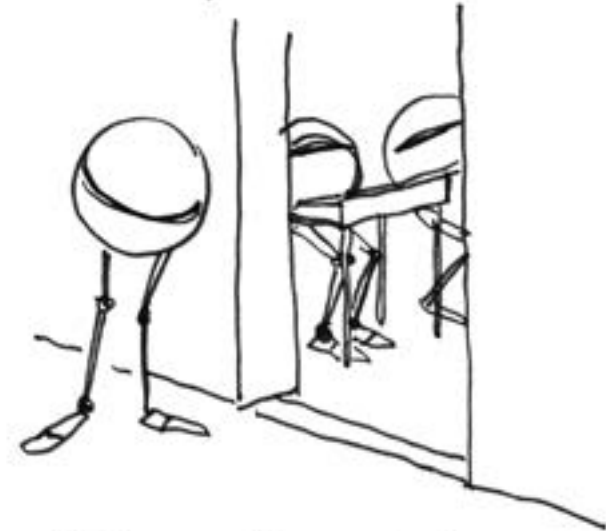


Because the ball is a pretty simple shape, have it be attacked by falling geometric shapes.

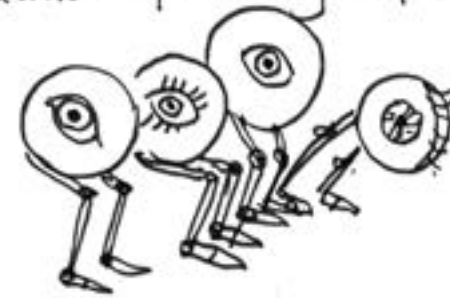


Would allow for some wacky running antics.

Second idea - psychological barriers.



I don't like small crowded rooms very much, especially entering one, so have Billy Bob experience the hesitation of entering a full class.



The first narrative ideas - 18/11/2015

Third idea:

The obstacle is authority.

The ball has to correct
its posture because
an authoritarian hand
is demanding it to.



I settled for the third idea. Billy Bob Thornton would have to deal with an authoritative figure that would correct him on something. Because the character is just a pair of hips with legs, this meant I could have fun with his posture, specifically with how he stands on his feet.

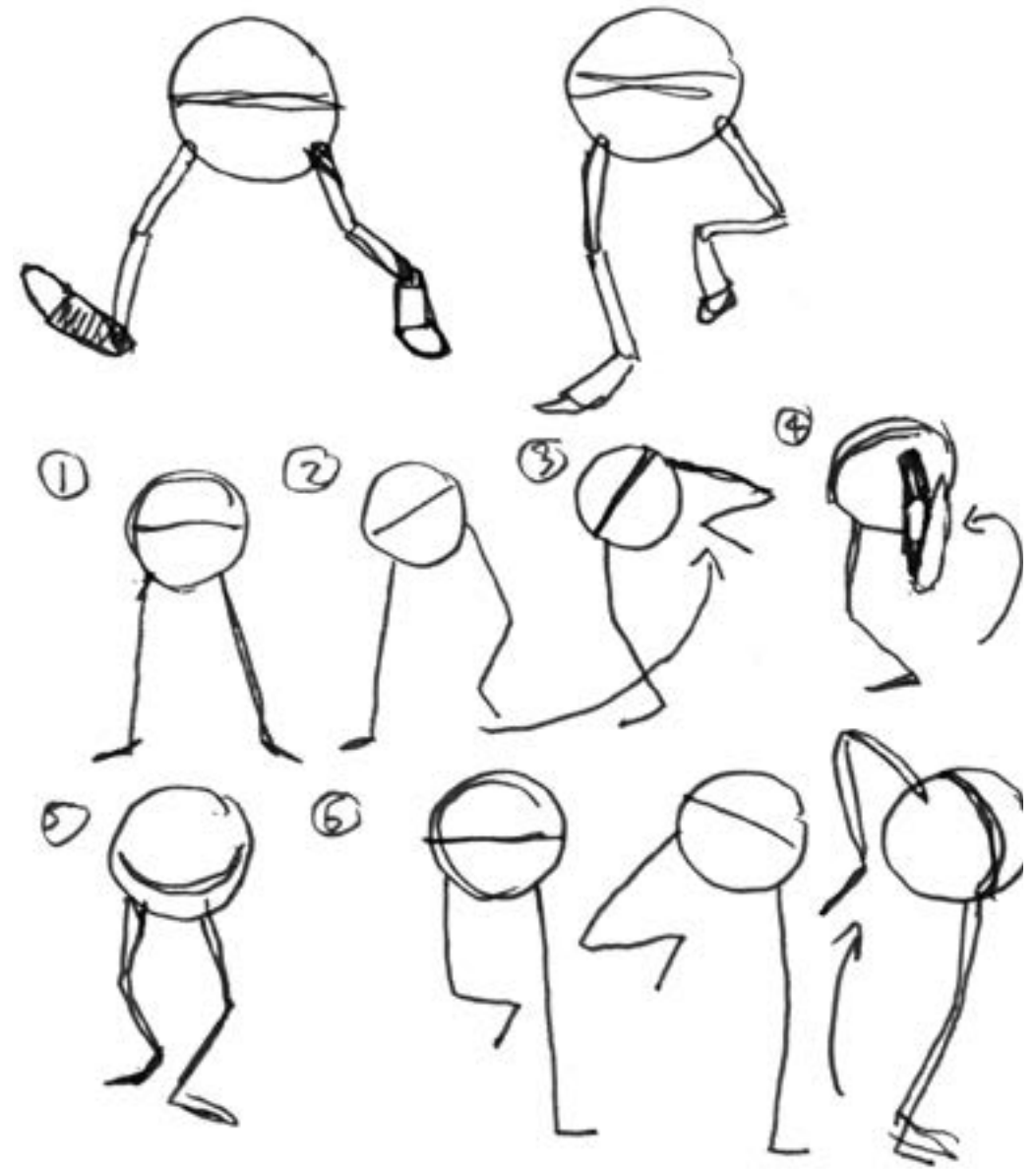
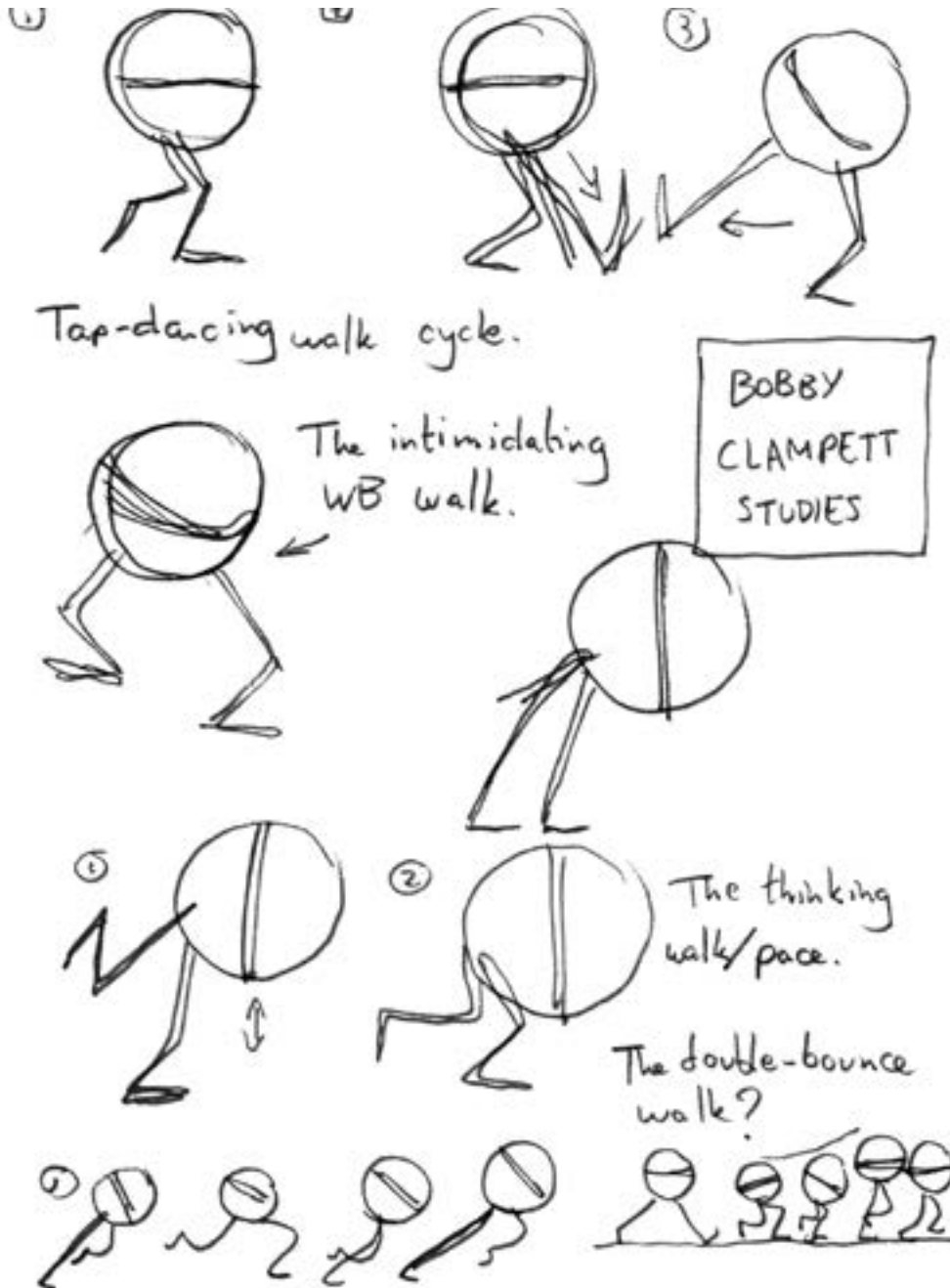
Why specifically posture? I used to be teased with how I carry myself and put my feet. I have been called 'penguin' by my parents because I had a tendency to walk with my feet far apart. I learnt to adopt a better posture and setting my feet right, so I decided that Billy Bob would portray this in a funny manner. The fact that he gets corrected by an invisible or abstract authority figure would make the piece more absurd, which fits well with Billy Bob's absurd appearance: a rather large sphere with skinny legs holding it up.

For the walk cycle I knew very early on that I wanted to explore classic animation, and in particular the work of Robert Clampett and how he exaggerated his characters. I had never really done any walk cycles before, so I wanted to tackle on a classic animation walk cycle - the double bounce walk - to see if I could come up with my own interpretation.

In the end there were three things I wanted to get out with Billy Bob:

- explore classic cartoons, specifically Bob Clampett's style. I like Chuck Jones for his restraint and expressions, but I love Bob for his exaggeration and wackiness.
- explore how walking actually worked in the real world and see if, like a Bob Clampett, I can apply my own observations and exaggerate it myself.
- explore visual languages in both animation and narration.

Sketching keys - 17/11/2015



Production Research - 18/11/2015

Rotoscoping a wide legged walk - Red Hot Rider, from Buckaroo Bugs, 1944, Robert Clampett.

Production Research - 18/11/2015

Rotoscoping a double bounce walk - Daffy Duck in Baby Bottleneck, 1946, by Robert Clampett.

(Baby Bottleneck 1946)

Production Research - 19/11/2015

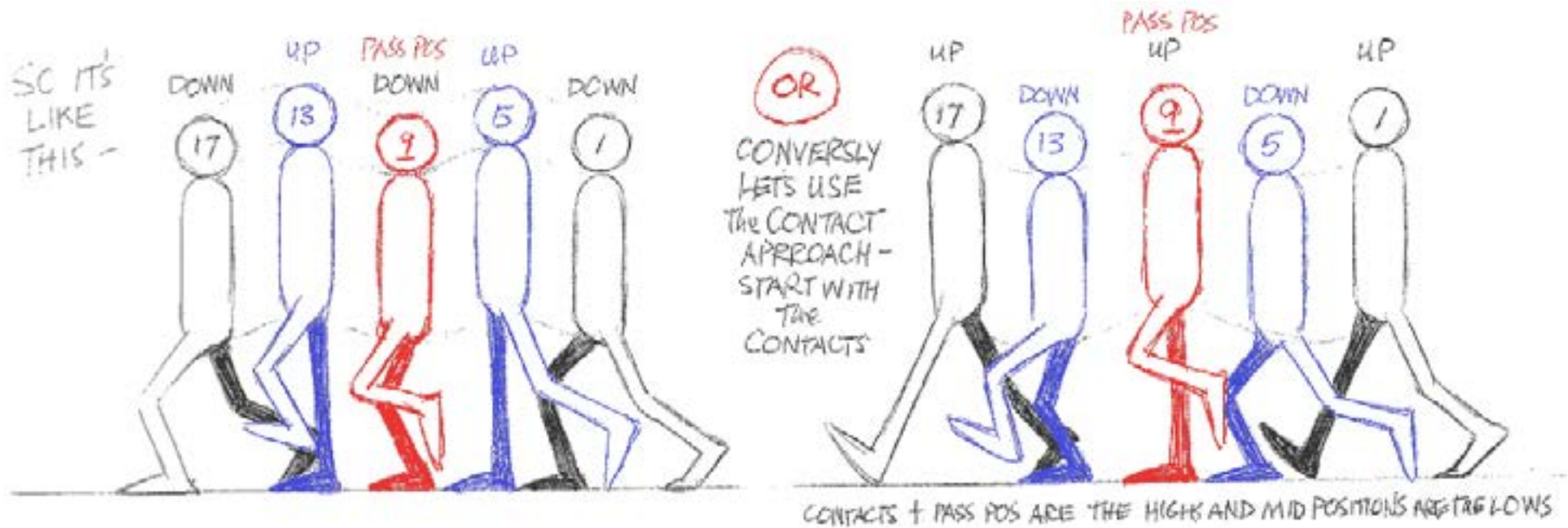
Rotoscoping myself seen from behind.

Production Research - 20/11/2015

Rotoscoping myself from the front, walking with my feet in my old manner.

Production Research - 21/11/2015

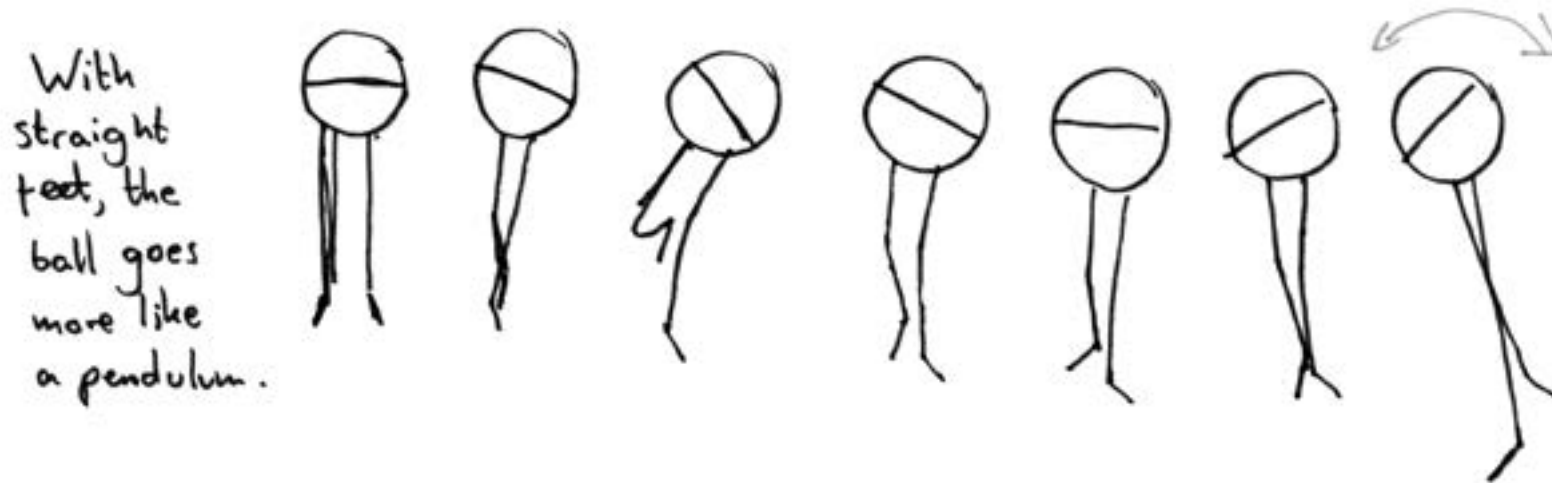
What does Richard Williams have to say about this?



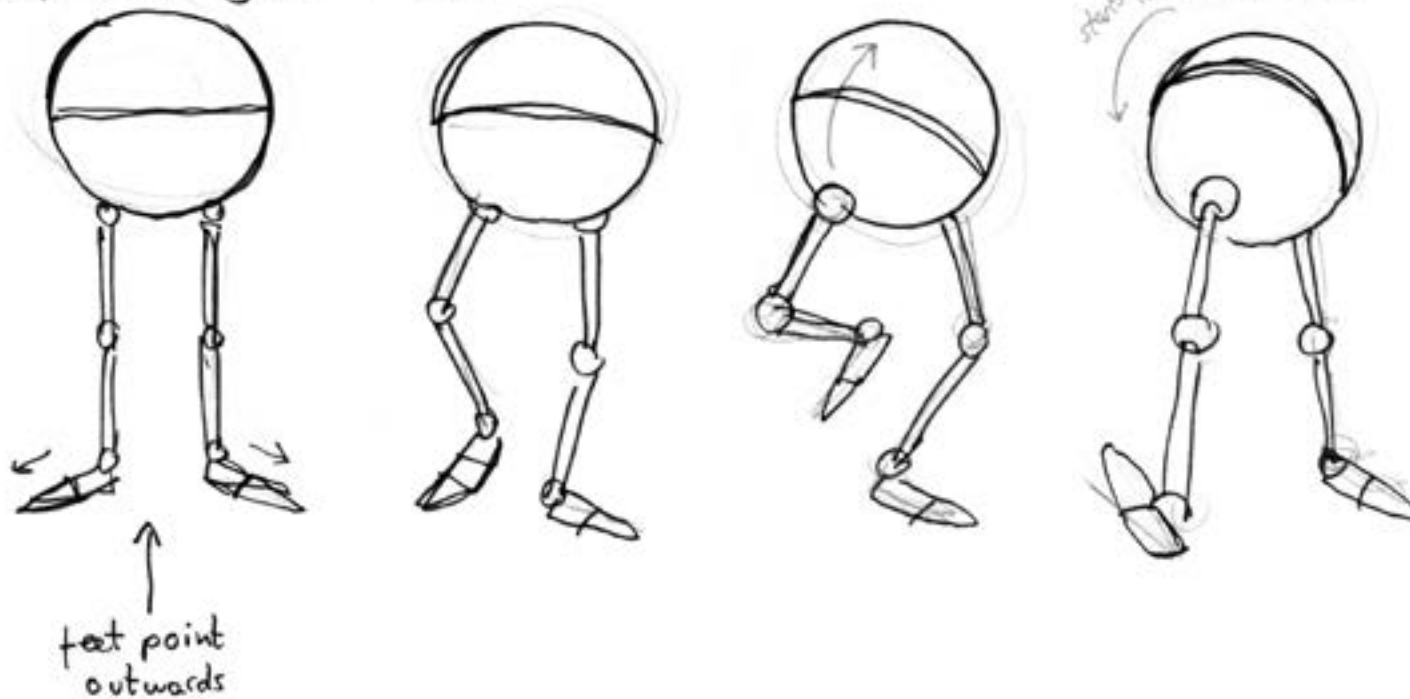
(Williams 2001)

Production Research - 21/11/2015

Sketching out keys for my version.

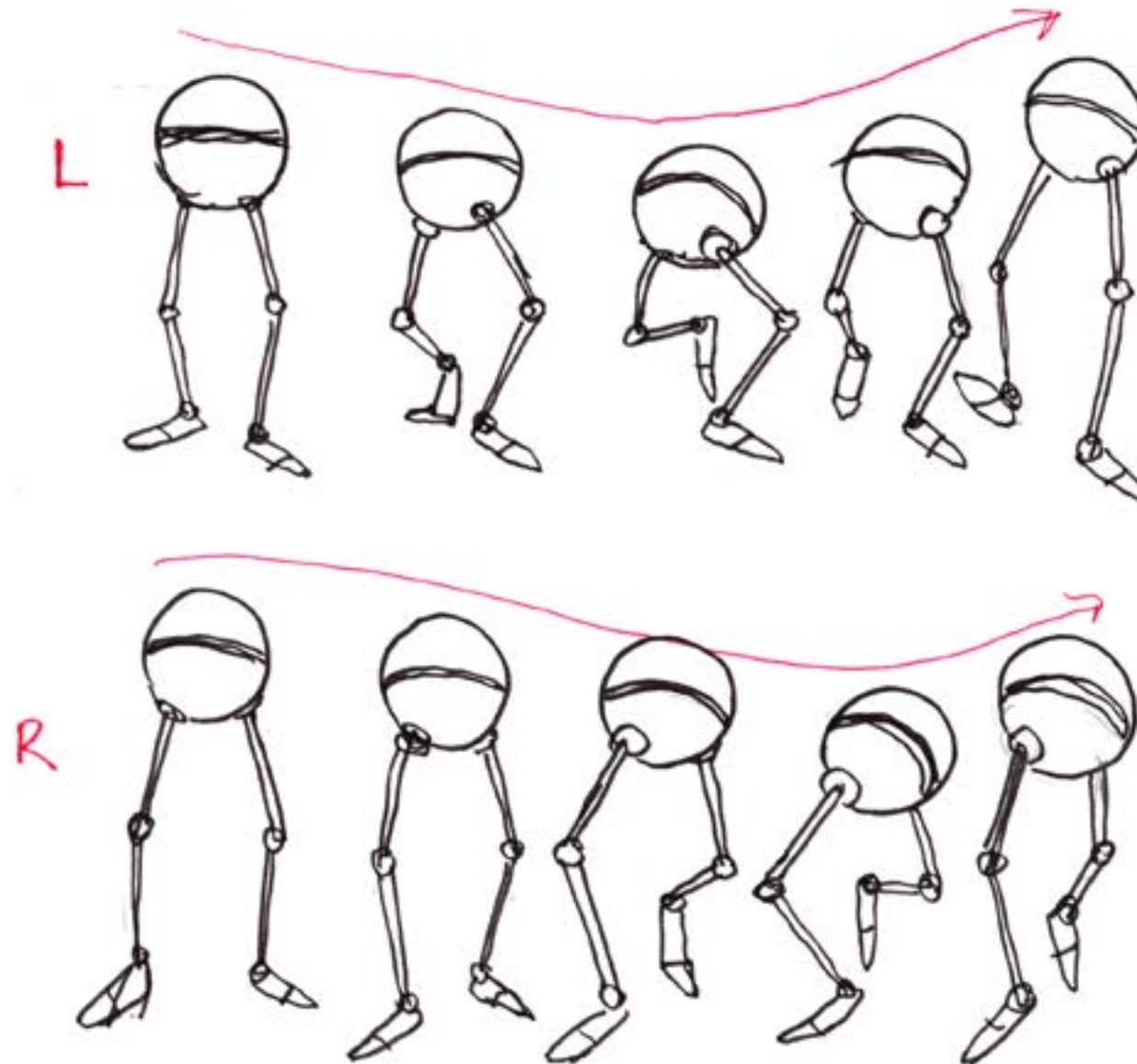


Attempt at thinking out a waddle.



Production Research - 21/11/2015

Sketching out keys for my version.



Production Research - 22/11/2015

Settling on the pitch for the narrative section:

Billy Bob Thornton is a ball with legs. There's not much he can do, but what he can do is walk. You'd think that a ball with such limited talents would be left alone and be free to do his own thing (which is walking) but you'd be wrong. You see, where Billy Bob's from, it's all about posture, so walking properly is so important, it's practically a law. Unfortunately, Billy Bob isn't the most graceful ball around (his legs are too far apart) and everywhere he goes, he is always being corrected on his way of walking. But Billy Bob doesn't mind too much, he plays along, and then he quickly falls back in his old ways.

The narrative:

The environment must reflect the authoritarian nature that Billy Bob has to deal with. There were a few considerations I was wrestling with:

- I needed an environment of some sort to help tell the narrative.
- Creating a new character would be very difficult and time consuming, Billy Bob's obstacles had to reflect some kind of authoritarian character while at the same time be easy and fast to make.
- Creating a whole environment had to be done in as efficient a manner as possible. I wanted to focus on the animation as much as I could, and spend as little time modelling as possible. In an ideal situation I would get all the animation done.

Production Research - 22/11/2015

In the narrative I chose for BBT, the environment would have to reflect the rigid nature of the authority that is correcting BB. I imagined him to be in a world that is obsessed with rules, and having a lot of surveillance. Where my first sketches for BB pictured the authority more as a large hand of god, and played on the Dutch phrase 'opgeheven wijsvinger' (an erect forefinger) that would push BB back into shape, I abandoned that idea because I was afraid it would take too long to model and sacrifice time I would need to animate BB. The 'character' I came up with was a surveillance camera, which made sense to me, as CCTV systems are normally associated with authoritarian states ('Big Brother is watching you') and surveillance cameras have just enough movement to them to give the idea of a head and an eye.

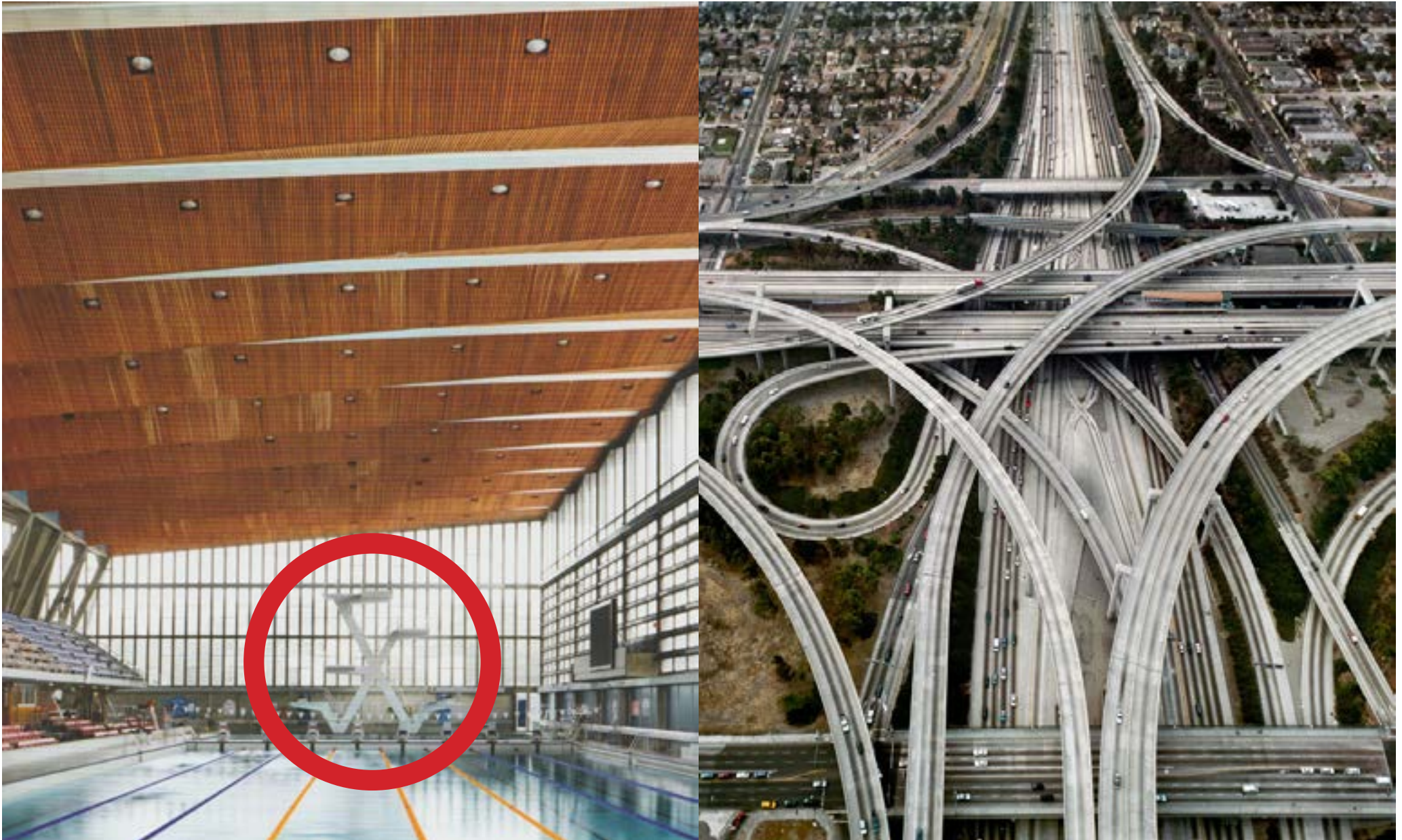
The rest of the environment had to fit in with this idea of authority. I very much liked the aesthetic of Porky Pig in Wackyland, (Billy Bob's character design fits right in with the wackier characters in the middle segment of the short) but I didn't think it would be appropriate for a world of rules. Instead, straight, rigid lines, dramatic perspective, and hard, inorganic structures would be more appropriate. I very much like the rather bleak aesthetic of Brutalism, and its association with governmental administrative buildings and dystopic environments and decided to use it with that. Finally, because BB is walking, it would make sense to create a world with viaducts, asphalt roads, and other ways for two-legged creatures without arms to walk around in.

Based on that I studied viaduct supporting structures and brutalism, noticing how many of them had strong diagonal lines, and came upon a design for a viaduct.

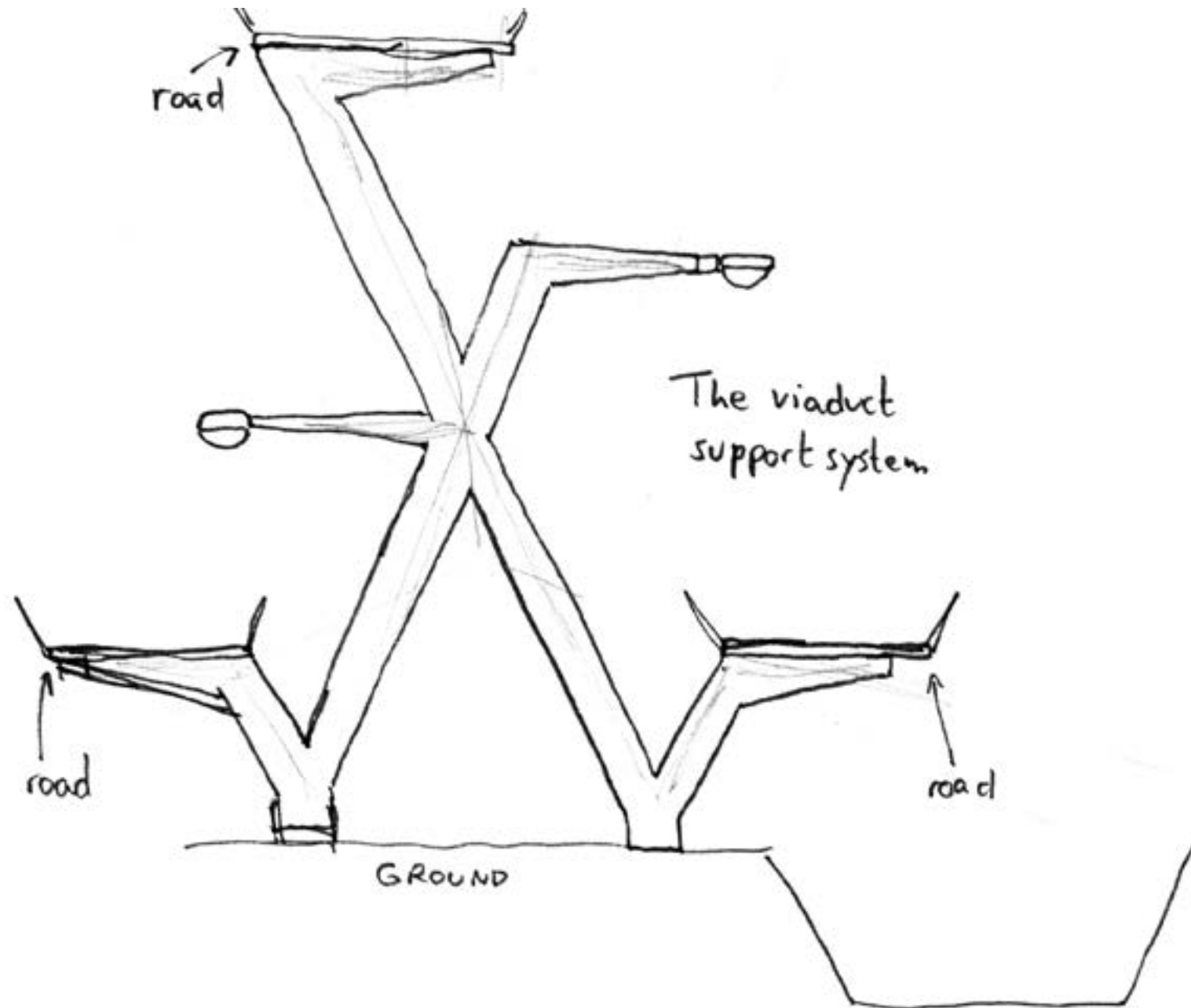
Production Research - 22/11/2015

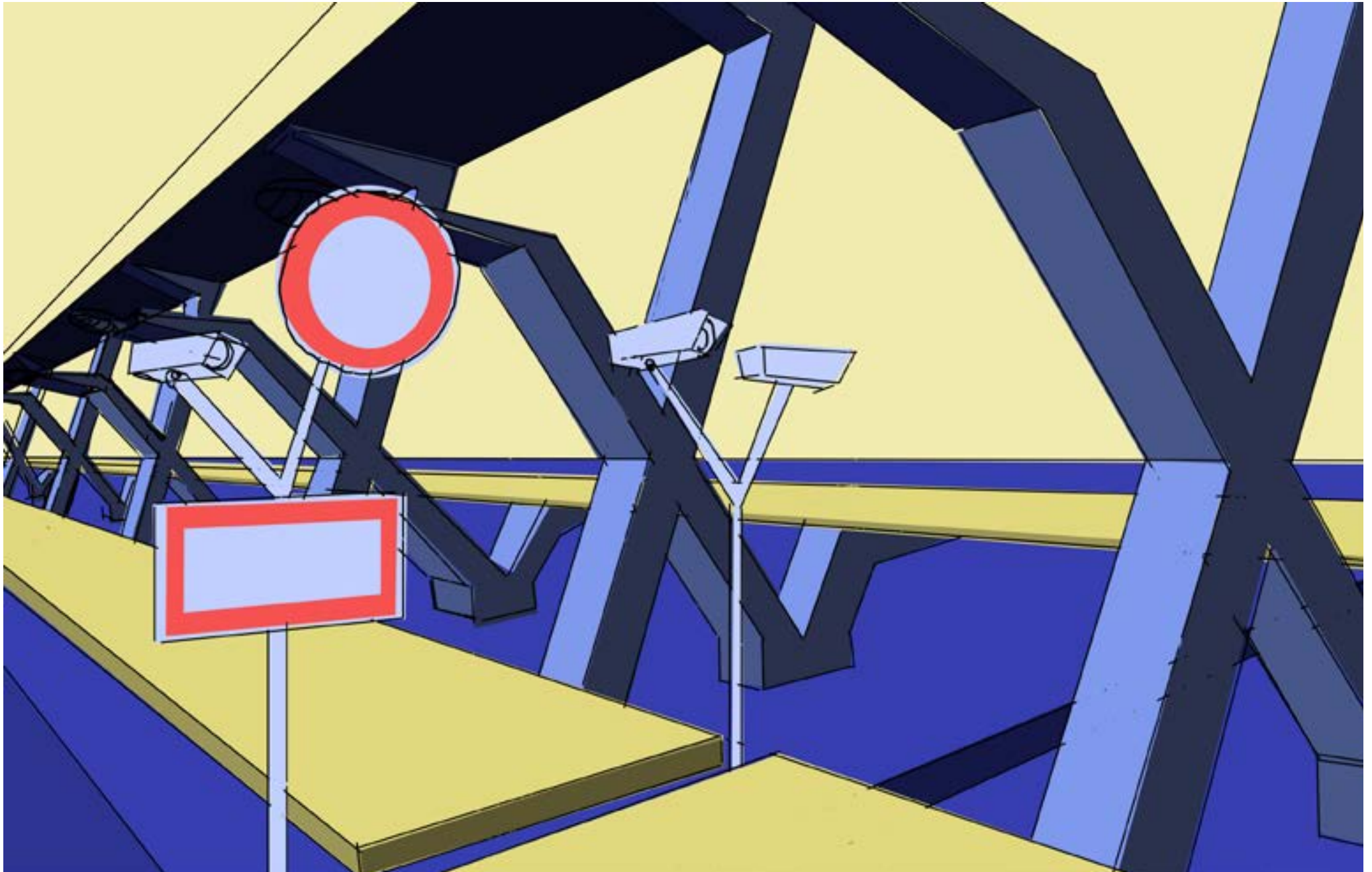


Brutalist moodboard for inspiration. Left to right: Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Allee der Kosmonauten (Berlin), Victor Enrich's NHDK photographic series, and a plate from 'Space Hope and Brutalism' (2015)

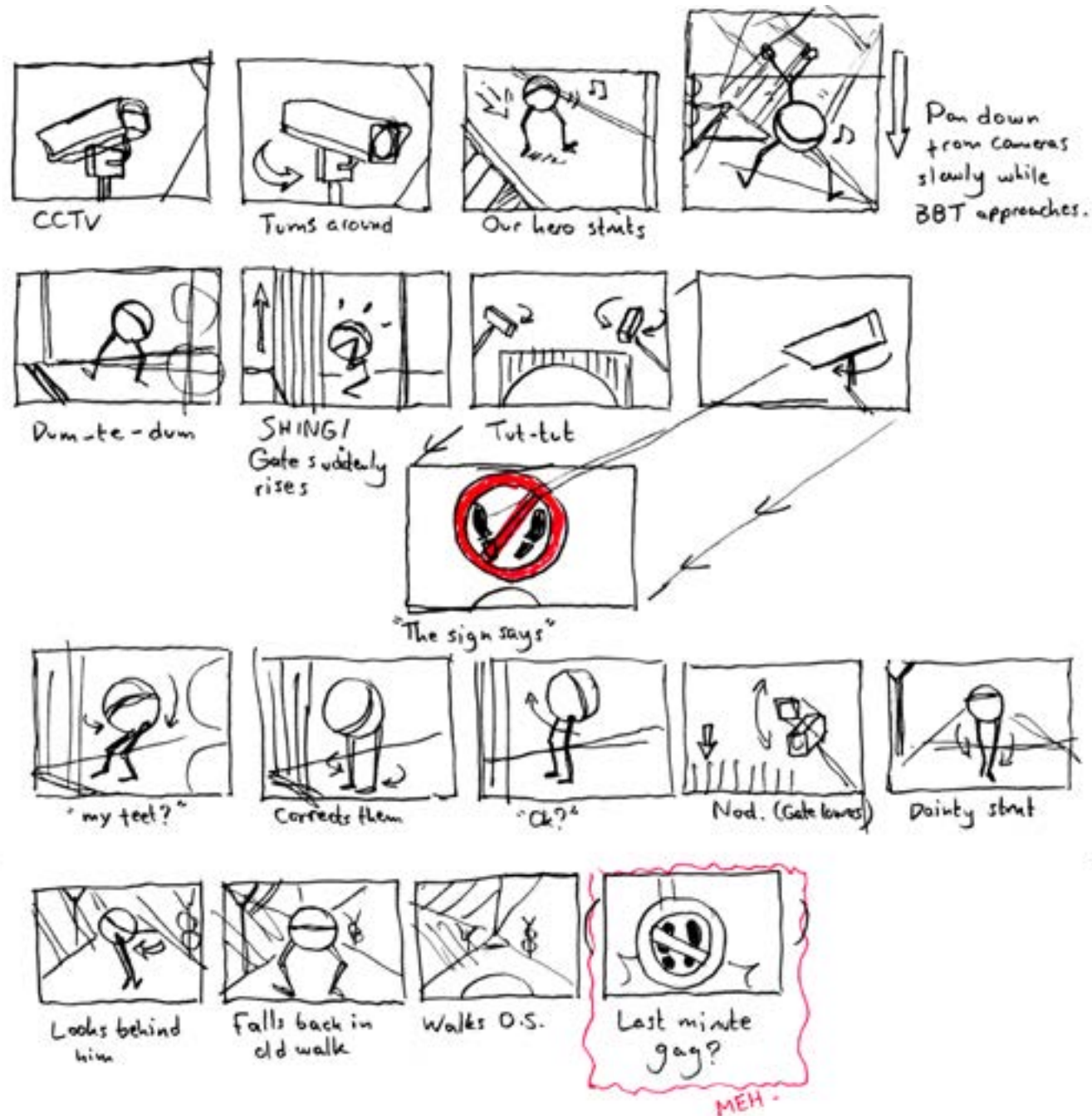


Moodboard. From left to right: swimming pool at the National Recreation Centre, Crystal Palace (I was looking at the diving board), and the highway intersection at Southern California.





Production Research - 22/11/2015



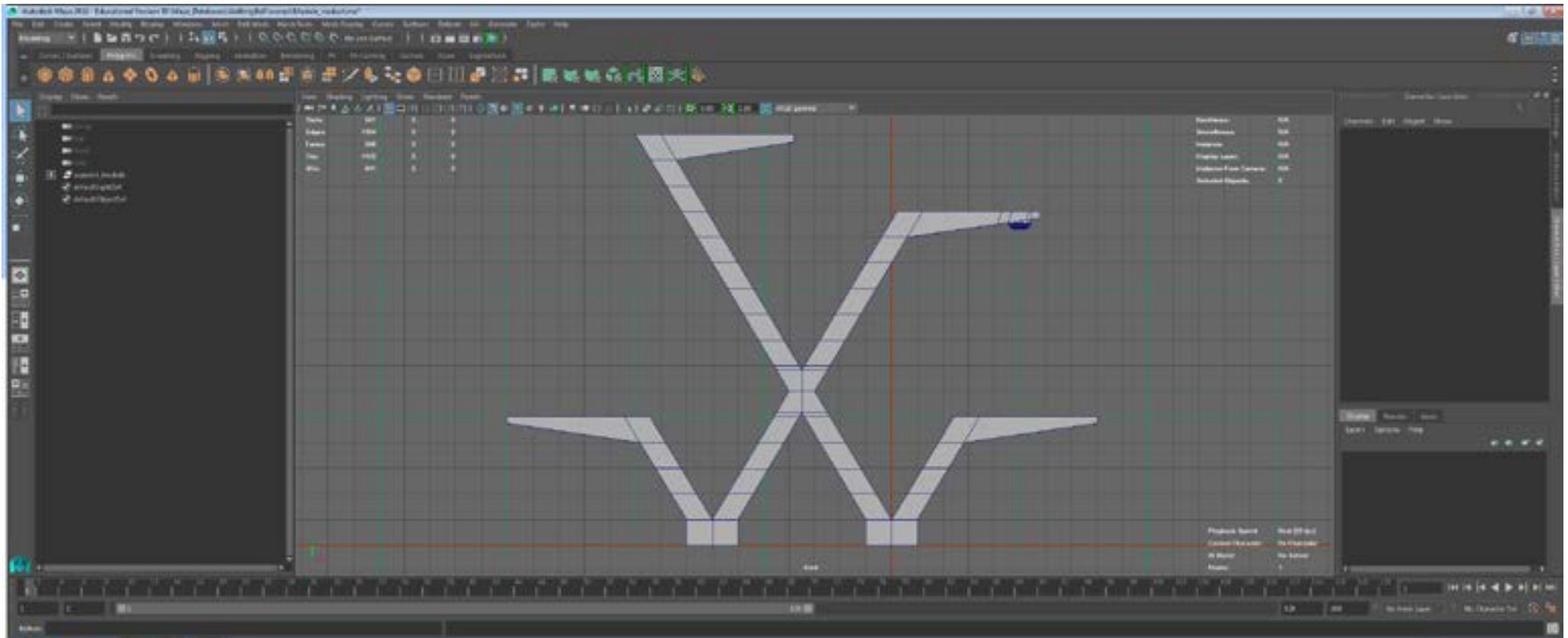
Production Research - 23/11/2015

After the feedback:

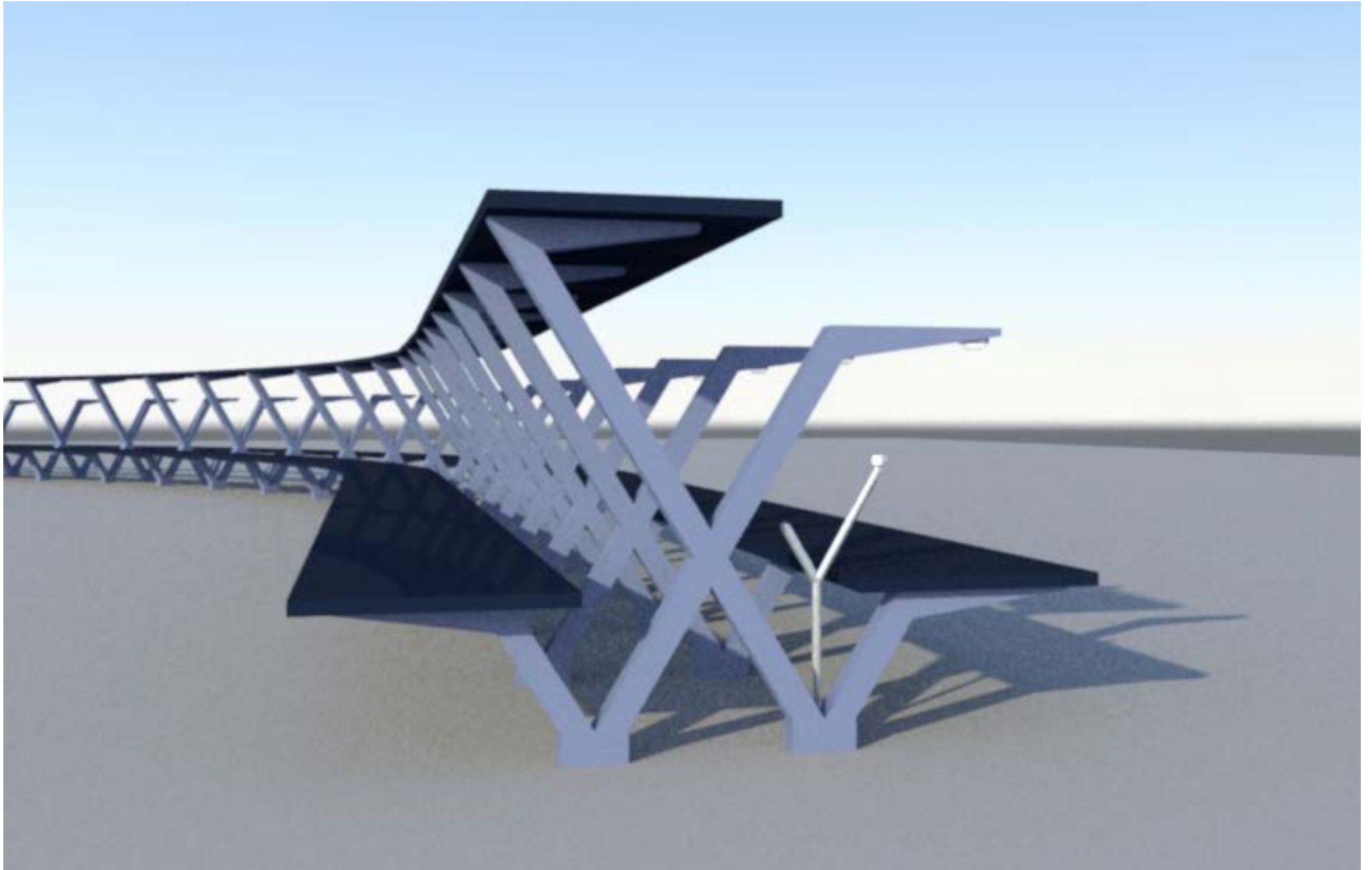
The storyboard was too general and would not fit within the amount of frames set. I made a short animatic and redid parts of the storyboard. While the timing seemed to work in the animatic (but was a bit rushed) I wasn't very sure if it would really work in the animation.

Production - 24/11/2015

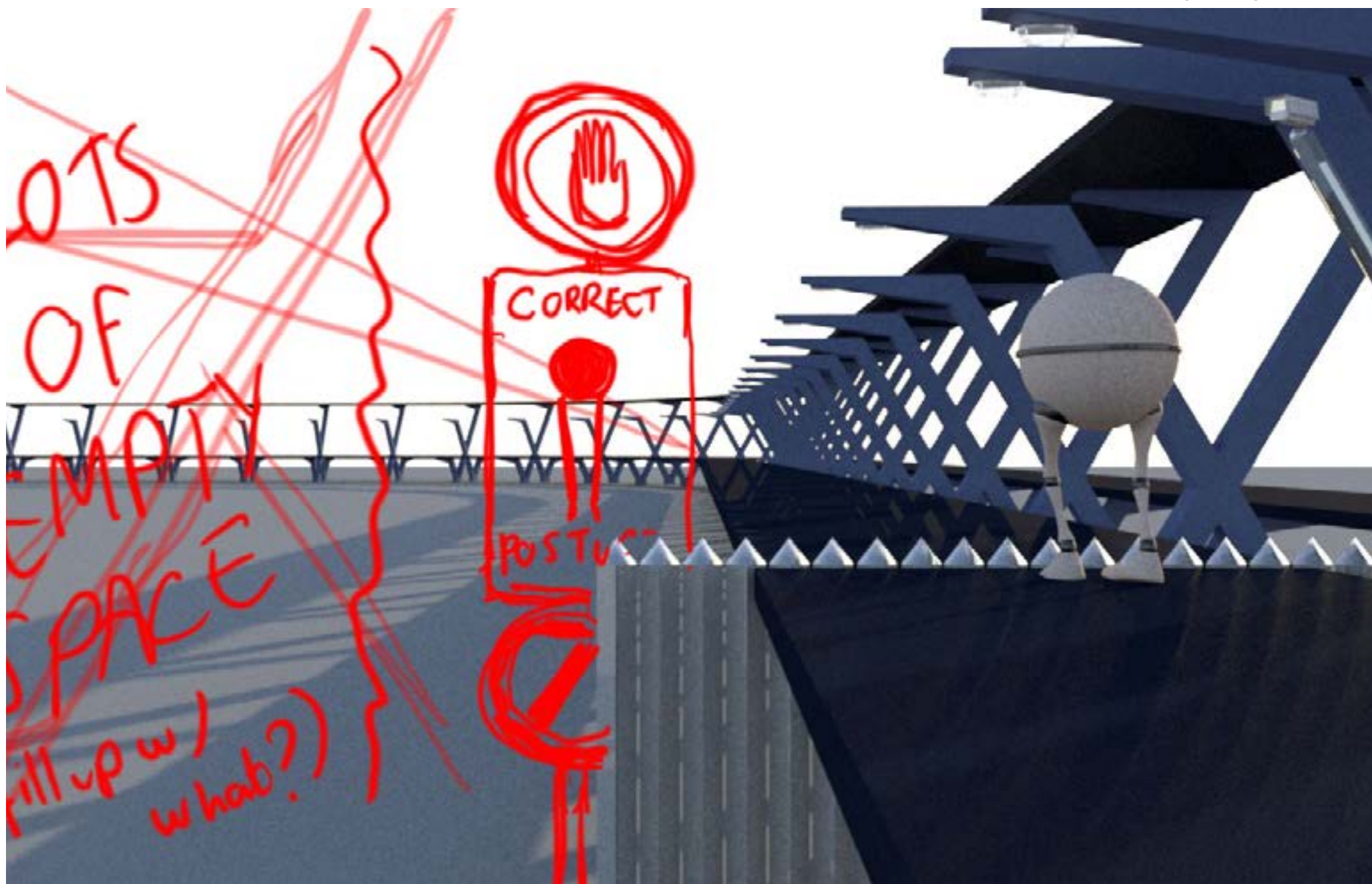
For the environment I went to work. I decided that making a relatively simple module, much like architects use prefab materials to dramatic effects, I could create an interesting and appealing environment. I did lose time however in the placement of the pillars. Emmanuel Tamas helped me out with that by giving me the valuable tip that I could use 'special duplicate' in Maya to replicate the pillars over the environment. I used that instead with the stripes on the road. I tried to keep this part of the production phase quick and efficient, so after I made the environment I added very little to it in the later stages of development.



Production - 25/11/2015



Production - 26/11/2015



Scening - 27/11/2015

While I was working on the environment I was also putting the rough animation into place. I made a rough edited playblast of the roughly blocked out animation with 7 cameras, based on the animatic I had already made, and realised that it wasn't working as well as I had hoped. I kept the 7 cameras, though, so I could later pick and choose the best shots for the final animation.

Scening - 27/11/2015

Here I made a second animatic of the scene to see which viewpoints I liked best and how the timing worked as a whole.

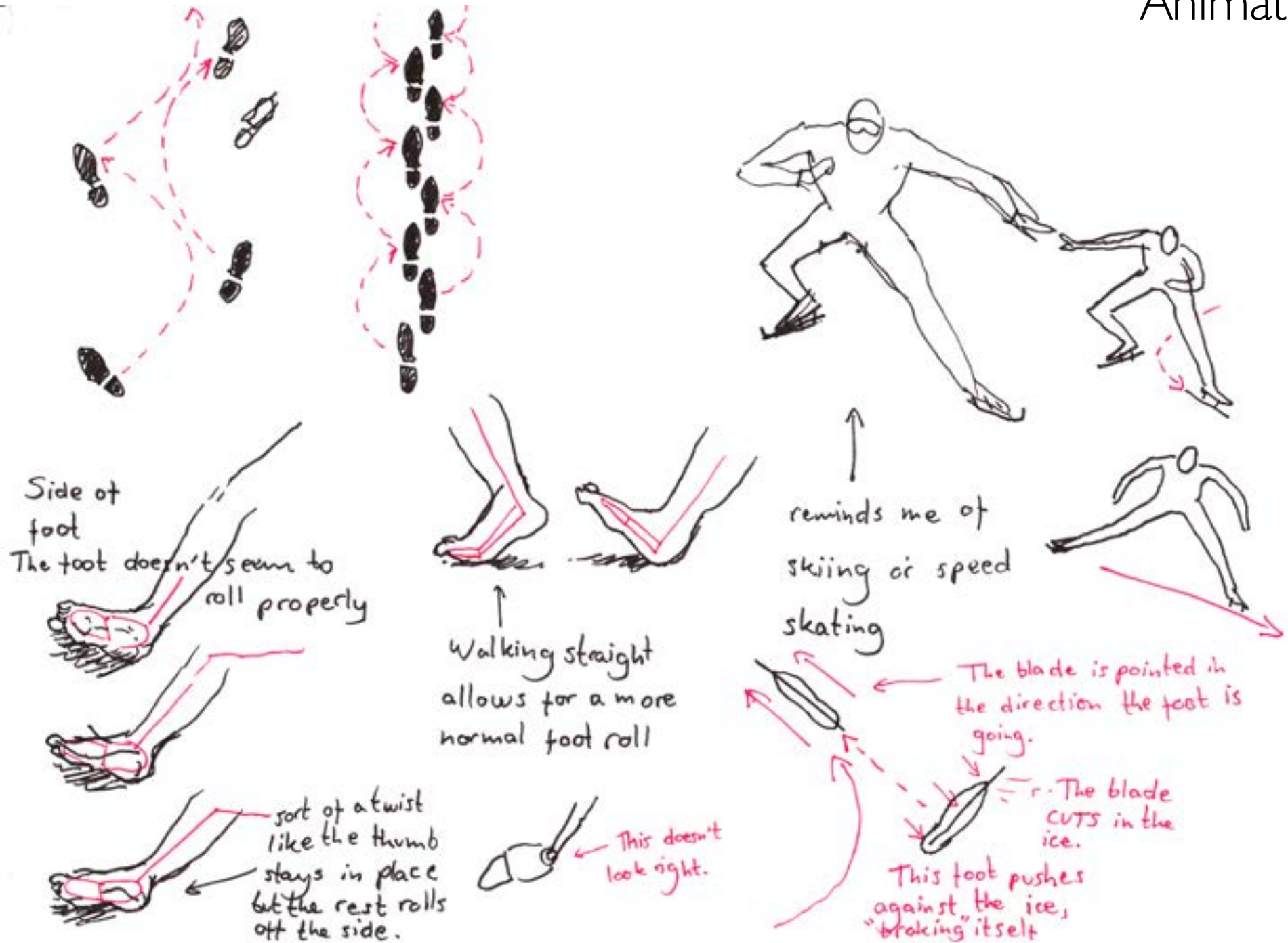
Animating - 28/11/2015 - 9/12/2015

Animation was the hardest. For the next project I feel I should be a lot more efficient and thorough in the research. While I had rotoscoped two different walks of myself and two different Bob Clampett walks, I realised that there were a lot of other factors playing into a walk than just the placement of the feet and the movement of the legs. I had to practice the walks all the time, and I took a lot of notes while animating to help me with corrections. I ended up doing a lot of corrections in the animation, and also redoing keyframes because I also had to come to grips with how the rig functioned.

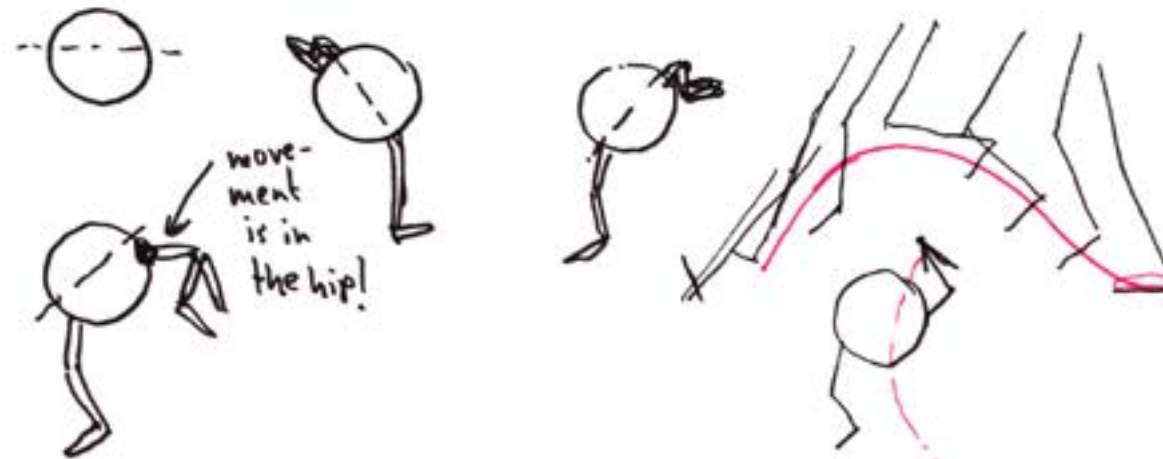
In the end, this film ended up with three distinct walk cycles:

1. a wacky, self-confident cartoony walk. I am very proud of my realisation halfway of how the leg swings inward from the contact position, it was from that point that making this walk became a lot more 'fun'. I especially enjoyed analysing how ice skaters move and comparing their movement with a wide-legged walk. I also realised the difference between a 'normal' wide-legged walk and a cowboy walk: cowboys tend not to bring their legs very close together when they walk. I did not really want a cowboy walk, but an energetic double bounce walk. I am not very happy with how the knees are in the low positions and I wonder if I exaggerated that too much in the keyframes.

Animating



17/12/2015



- ✓ Redo the steps, this time getting every key in the right position



- ✓ Contact steps are all
- ✓ Departure steps are all



Animating



extra "bounce" here



Some arcs can be higher

I want prob. 3 or 4 cycles (2 steps per cycle)



Some arcs can have an extra extension



Or a little flourish with the foot.



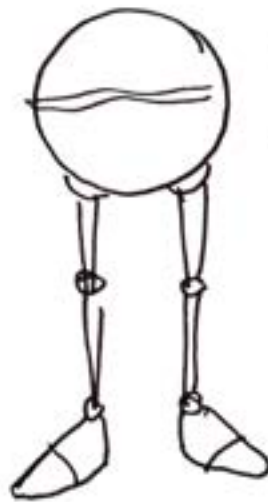
a little tap dance too

Animating

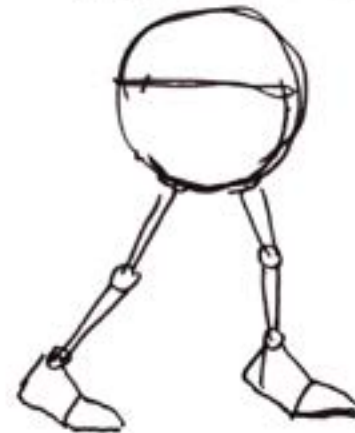
2. The second one was a neat and dainty walk. This one was very frustrating, as I was struggling with Billy Bob's rig, and trying to comprehend how I would picture a neat walk. There are a lot of factors in correct posture, and my initial one, straightening the feet, was not enough to show the contrast between one walk and the other. The other factor, walking with the legs in one line, as if on a tightrope, created a very exaggerated hip movement that I liked, but wasn't enough either! It was only when I realised that elegant walks do not tend to take very large, mannish steps, that I managed to create a greater contrast. I am still not completely satisfied with this walk: I am not sure if I exaggerated the hip movement too much and the model 'pops' at places that I don't like. Getting the timing right was another issue. I first made it much too fast, and I still feel that it is slightly too fast. I'm not sure about the beginning of the walk: I felt like the tiptoe over the gap was either too fast or too slow.

Animating

How to walk elegantly?



Billy Bob's proportions are annoying!



Fashion models walk on their toes because they wear high heels.

He still has a slouching posture!!



BIG feet

short legs



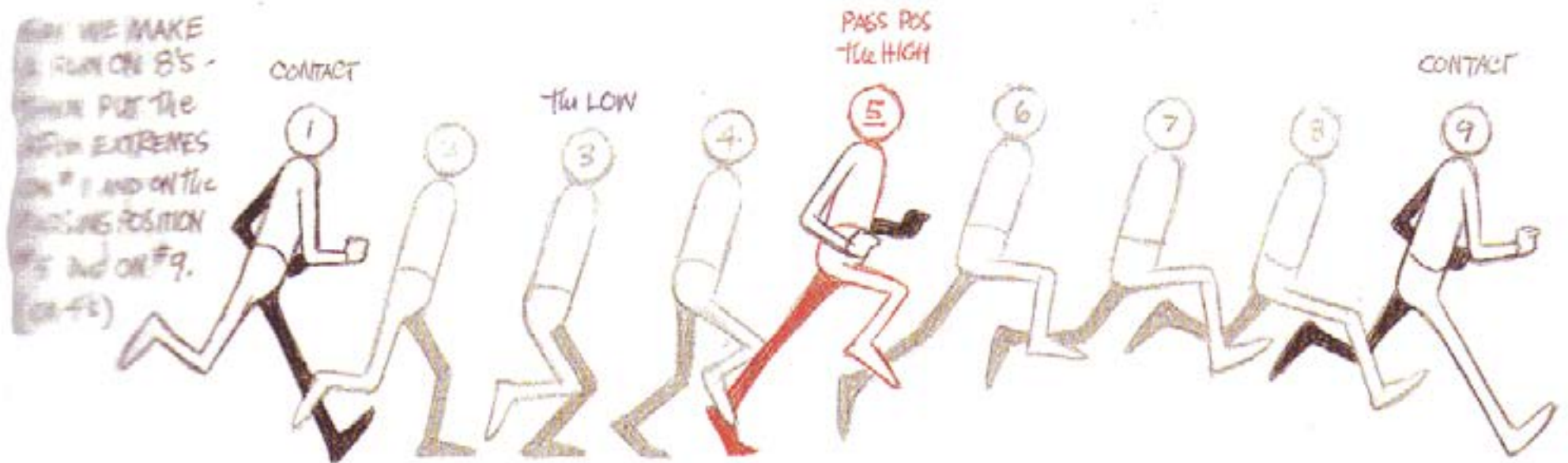
Billy Bob's legs are very far ~~apart~~ apart and making him walk with his legs together is hard!



Exaggerate hip movement

Animating

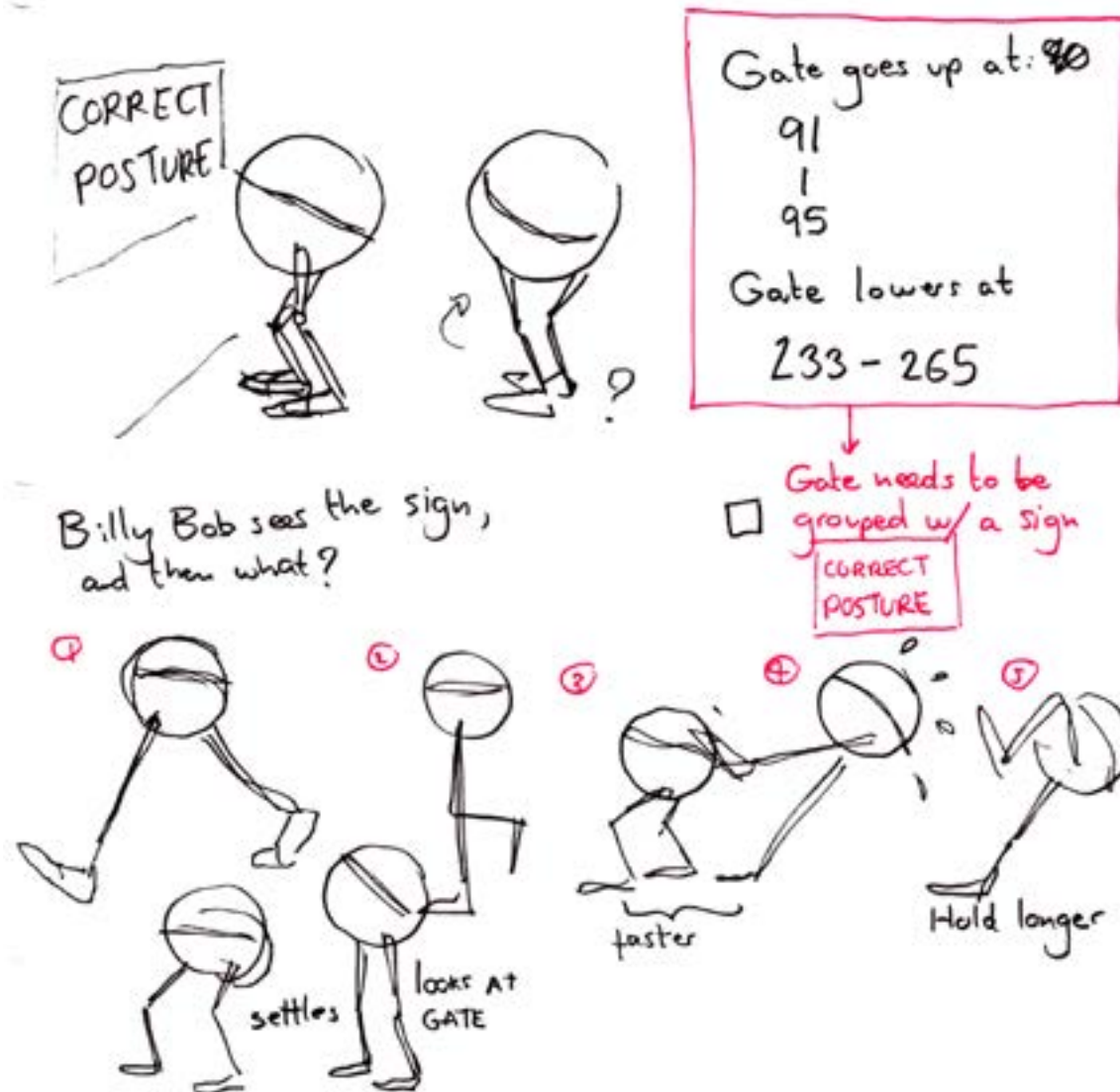
The run felt like the easiest one to make, mostly because it was the shortest one. For that one I mostly referred to Richard Williams' keyframes.



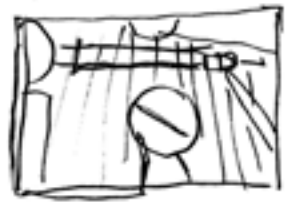
(Williams 2001)

Animating

In the process of animating, I also added quite a few revisions to the storyboard and trying to understand how Billy Bob reacts to the gate.



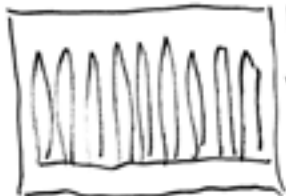
Animating



← On this image there should be one more sign. This time on the gate itself.
Camera is pointing down and watching the ball.
Shakes this head. Not much movement from ball here. (slow resetting)



← THEN cut to BB adjusting pose



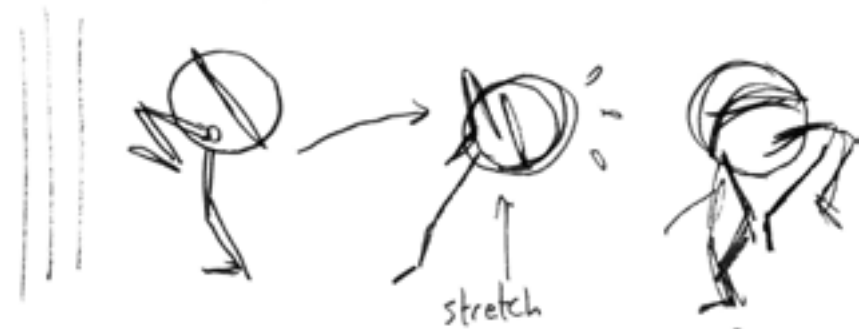
Gate lowers and BB walks off elegantly



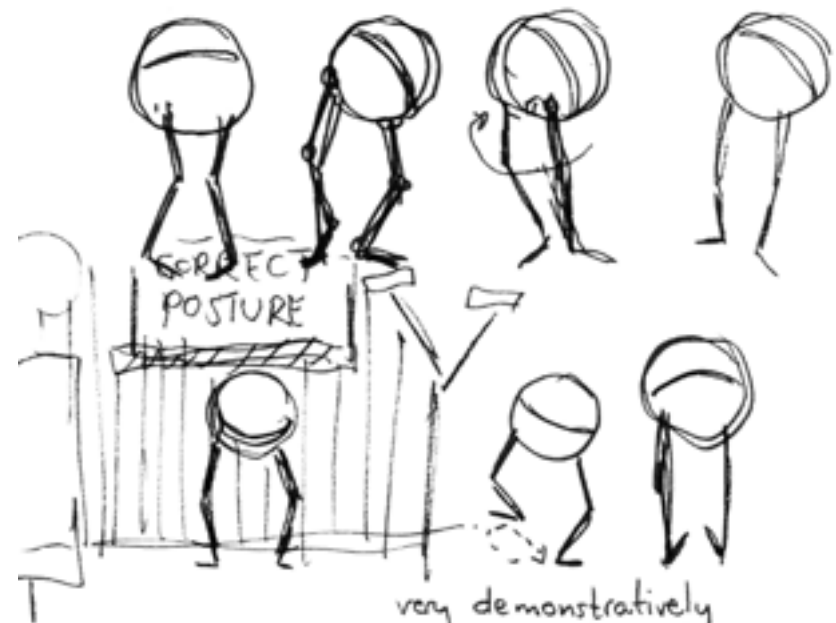
BB steps in proper ways

- Runs off
- THWACK!

Road should have sign on texture:
NO RUNNING (white letters)



very quickly to this position ?



very demonstratively placing legs properly.



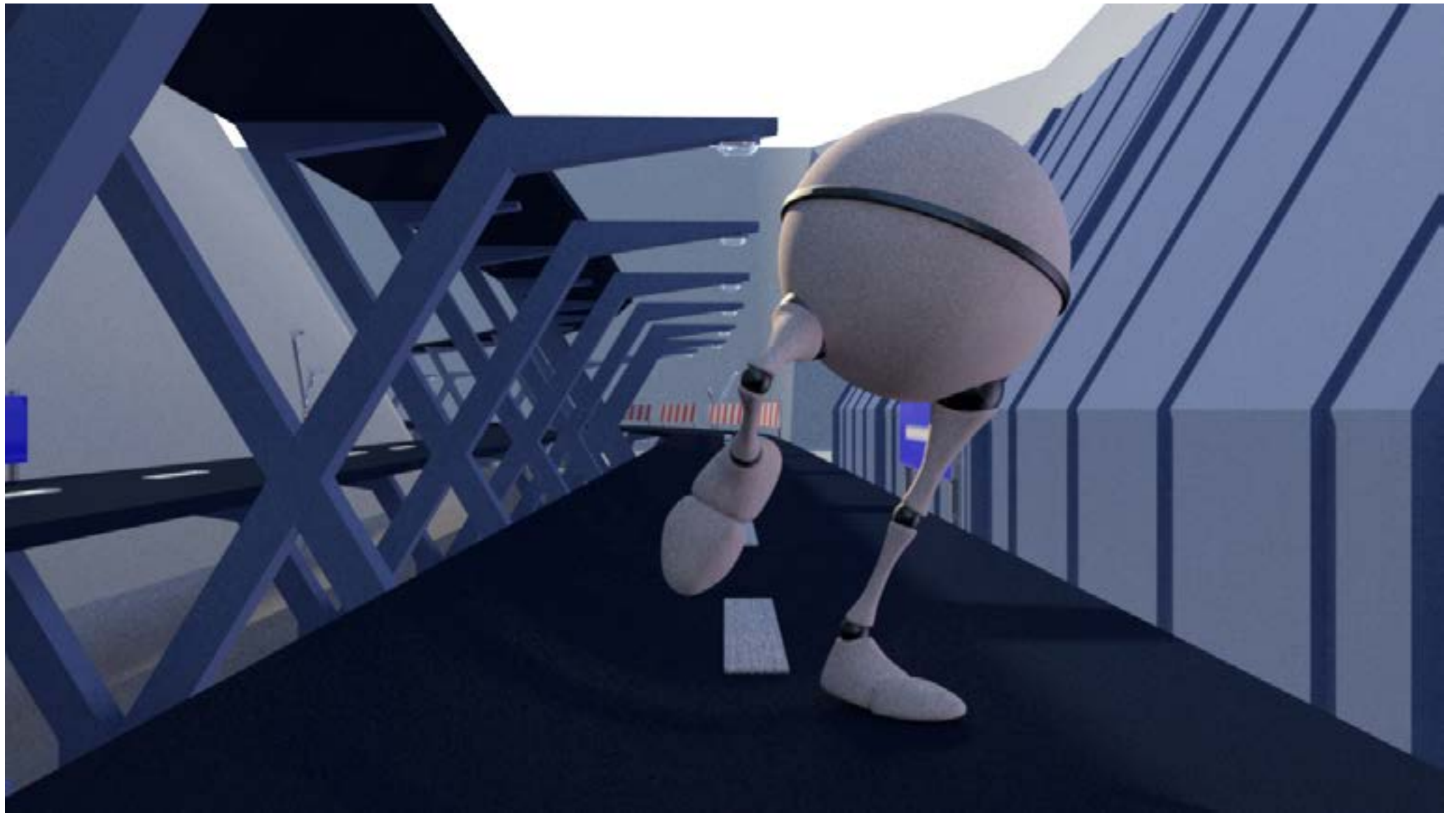
← for this one, legs should cross in front of each other.

Lighting and final touches

I had been working in Maya 2016 for the animation, and I had installed some rudimentary lighting that I considered a 'placeholder', leaving the final lighting for the last part. Because I focused so much on the animation, several essential props I needed for the narrative still needed to be modelled, and were done towards the end. In retrospect, I should have had a clearer idea of what I wanted with the environment. The viaduct that I made worked very well, but I did not really think about what surrounded it, and I should have thought about that in more detail. In any case, with help from Davide Pieropan and Chloe Phipps I managed to make some textures for the signs and I was happy that I did not have to spend too much time on those.

In the end, I had to redo the lighting when I exported the scene file to 2015 and I had to correct certain textures that were creating problems with the v-ray lighting and the renderer. A particular problem I had was that I wanted to have an asphalt like texture on the road, so I combined a blinn with a Maya pre-made rock bump map. It did not work well at all with the settings that I had, as the road showed very nasty white noisy spots that I did not really know how to fix. I eventually remade the texture and made the shininess of it much less dramatic. I am not very pleased with the quick concrete texture I assigned to the viaduct's support structure, and if I had more time I would have spent more time to make it look less like painted rough plaster.

As for the lighting: I really could have benefitted to have started the environment with a better lighting plan so that I wouldn't be taken by surprise at the end when I wanted to render and realised that I had to redo all my lights from mental ray to Maya as the physical sun and sky preset in mental ray will not render in V-Ray.



Final Thoughts

Overall, for a next time I should do a more thorough study of the movement that I want to create, as well as not only just registering myself doing the non-exaggerated version of it, but more thorough video footage showing the actual exaggerated movement as done by a human being so that I would have a better idea of how the weight is balanced and how the limbs and joints bend to support the weight.

I enjoyed this project, but I also wish I had managed my time better. I wasted a lot of time redoing the animation because of new information that I learnt and wanted to apply to the animation. I also had trouble with working with the rig, and I think I should have practiced more with it in the pre-production stage so that I would have a better expectation and be better prepared for working with it. On the other hand, I am very happy with how much I learned about movement in a walk cycle and I feel I am starting to have a better understanding of motion in general. I also thoroughly enjoyed creating the environment and the lighting, though I had to redo quite a bit of the latter, but that also enable me to find a nicer solution than what I initially had.

Lastly, I found the help of the other people in this course extremely valuable. In particular the ones who were doing the modelling part of the assignment were very helpful in efficiently applying textures and setting the scene up for rendering!

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