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Introduction

This special edition of *EnterText* appears at a time when both animation as a form and Animation Studies as a putative discipline are undergoing something of a renaissance. Some animated films can be huge box-office successes, while others are still being seen as cutting-edge experimentation and/or underground “cult” subversion. Animation on television is consistently popular. The shifts just mentioned do not mean there is a massive rupture with the past; indeed, there are many connections and continuities between twenty-first century animation and that from the early part of the last century. Witness the recent Rotoshop experiments of Bob Sabiston (for example, the Richard Linklater-directed *Waking Life* (2001) and the forthcoming adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s *A Scanner Darkly* (2005), which will use the same mind-bending software), and compare how they play out a number of the same problems and debates as rotoscoped animation from the late teens and into the twenties and thirties of the last century.

Where there has been a seismic shift is in the development of digital technologies and their application in the fields of visual representation. The impact of this shift is still

being felt and will take many more years to be fully understood. Again, though, it is important to note that these are always shifts—what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have referred to as “remediations”—rather than complete over-turnings or replacements of what went before.¹ The relationship between the indexical, live-action moving image and the completely manufactured, animated moving image can therefore be seen as a set of shifting sands. There has always been a close and potentially problematic relationship between the two, but recent developments mean that we have to interrogate the relationship more carefully than ever before. “Animation,” in the form of digital compositing and other effects, is routinely used in live-action films, and passes off as part of the live-action palette. Live-action, for its part, is arguably a form of animation in any case: a series of movements recorded one frame at a time, albeit carried out at twenty-four or twenty-five frames per second by the camera/projector mechanism.

All of this is to say that we need to move beyond essentialist definitions of animation as a form, and look to the ways that it overlaps with and reconfigures all manner of other types of audio-visual representation. This will mean attending to troubling questions about the ontological status of images, but also, on a more “pragmatic” level, mean that research needs to be carried out at the “micro” level, examining what “animation” might mean in a range of different cultural contexts and historical conjunctures.

With this in mind, the starting-point for this special edition is to demonstrate the breadth and depth of both animation theory and practice. It is important to note that while the issue consists mainly of contributions where the authors engage with moments of animation history, or particular animators, or particular debates pertaining to animation as

a field, it also includes some animators reflecting on their own practice. The edition is divided into two sections: six essays examining various aspects of animation, and four pieces where animators reflect on their own practice. I strongly believe that we need to offer a forum for both types of work, and attempt to build the connections between theory and practice, creativity and reflection. This is something that *EnterText* has done very well in the past; I hope this edition continues in that spirit.

Giannalberto Bendazzi's work will be familiar to anyone who knows about Animation Studies. I am especially pleased that we were able to translate his essay *Il cinema d'animazione africano* from the original Italian, and that it appears here, in keeping with the journal's ongoing interest in translation, in both its original and English versions, the latter entitled *African Cinema Animation*. Bendazzi's contribution takes the form of a survey of the field of African animation, asking the very pertinent question "Does anybody know anything about it?" To many Western readers (and, I daresay, readers from elsewhere, even Africa itself) much of the animation under discussion here will be unfamiliar. More research is clearly needed, but this pioneering effort very usefully maps some of the terrain, including some interesting historical background on key African animators such as the Frenkel Brothers and Moustapha Alassane.

The intense difficulty of defining how new technologies have impacted on representation, and of the attempts to legislate for those changes, is tackled by Joanna Bouldin. In this important essay, Bouldin examines the ways that notions of the "virtual" body and the seductive power of "photorealism" are implicated in the legal discourses surrounding attempts to legislate against child pornography in the United States. We are in what has been termed a "post-photographic" age, where the digitally manipulated,

“dubiative” image raises all sorts of problems. Bouldin usefully discusses this legal, moral and ethical minefield in terms of “criminal realism” and “counterfeit realism,” arguing that what some people find so problematic about certain digitally-rendered images is that they “allow the paedophile to experience them as if they were real, turning their dangerous fantasies into a kind of phenomenal reality.” This is therefore a theoretical discussion with very real (no pun intended) consequences; it is also a discussion that is informed by key debates from within Animation Studies, to do with the ontology of the image, the “power” of the digital, and some of the problems with techniques such as “morphing.”

Although discussing very different material, David Surman’s essay tackles somewhat similar theoretical terrain, in that it is concerned with questions of realism and representation—namely, the use of caricature in animation. The “hyperreal” Disney aesthetic, and the style and caricature used in the Fleischer Brothers’ *Superman* series (Surman’s main example) are examined for the ways in which they play out and, more to the point, *suppress* some of the “excesses” of drawn animation. Approaching the question of animation caricature from a perspective that uses the theories of Gombrich and Töpffer and recent film theory, as well as attending to the socio-cultural contexts of specific animated films, Surman’s essay is a good example of the current cross-disciplinary strengths apparent in much animation scholarship.

Another area that is being explored with great interest is the role of the audience or individual spectator. Suzanne Buchan’s essay, focusing on the Quay Brothers’ strange animated puppet films, opens up how these films in particular (and animation in general) address their audience. Using a phenomenologically-influenced theoretical frame, she

asks what happens when a viewer “experiences” an animated film? What if we *know* that the “world” we are viewing has no relation to the real, phenomenal world of actuality—and, more to the point, if we also know that the moving things we can see are really *inanimate*, rather than *animate*? In the Quays’ skewed universe, found objects (screws and other paraphernalia) and the aforementioned puppets blur the edges between different “worlds.” As Buchan puts it, “Puppet animation thus represents a different ‘world’ for the spectator, something between ‘*a* world,’ created with the animation technique, and ‘*the* world,’ in its use of real objects and not representational drawings.”

Michael Nottingham’s essay offers an intriguing reading of the great Czech surrealist Jan Svankmajer. Often working with pixillated real humans (real actors shot one frame at a time, like the “stop motion” the Quays use for their puppet and object animation) and grotesquely animated found objects, Svankmajer’s work is justly celebrated for its wit and invention, as well as its downright oddness. Nottingham focuses on the role of meals, food and eating in Svankmajer’s films, relating these themes to the dark “folk-festive” thread that runs through much Central and Eastern European art. As Nottingham points out, a Bakhtinian reading of Svankmajer is perhaps most useful, drawing as it does on this notion of the “folk-festive:” “References to the folk-festive in Svankmajer’s films include the marionette theatre, hyperbolised distortion (or destruction) of the body, and, in particular, images of food and of the mouth.”

Thomas Lamarre examines a key area in his essay on “otaku movement”—that of spectator (or, more accurately, fan) *agency*. The “otaku” (or obsessive Japanese animation [*anime*] fan) is a vital new stage in the history of “fandom” in that he (and it is usually a “he”) in many ways represents a breakdown in previously-accepted hierarchies

of production and reception. Otaku are partly characterised by their *creative* endeavours around the films and programmes they love—they are not “mere” consumers. In addition to this, many animation producers (e.g. Okada Toshio, founder of Gainax, one of Japan’s most famous animation studios) are also shameless “fans.” As Lamarre puts it, “Producers are, above all, fans; and fans are budding producers. Even if fans don’t actually form animation studios, as did the Gainax founders, they are so active in consumption that consumption becomes akin to production—as if fans had become co-producers or co-operators.” As the essay argues, such a shifting relationship has implications for how we view certain types of knowledge (e.g. “official” or “unofficial”), approaches to thinking about labour, and the troubling issues of national and personal identities.

The final four pieces included as HTML files are all reflections-on-practice. Of course, all the essays mentioned above are this too, but the vital distinction here is that these are practising animators talking about their own work. This kind of reflection is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it gives us a special insight into the creative processes involved in animation. Despite an increased visibility and popularity for (certain kinds of) animation, many people still have little understanding of what goes into it, how it is “done.” The second reason is related to this: we need more writing where the supposedly “separate” activities of “theory” and “practice” are dialectically inter-related. As a couple of these contributors point out, animators can be a strange breed, and what they do is intense, detailed, often mind-bogglingly single-minded in its focus. But in their inherent attention to detail (in that they are involved in the production of every frame) we

have a useful framework in which the very notions of “production” or “creativity” or “practice” can be scrutinised (or, dare I say it, “theorised”).

As George Griffin says in the first few lines of his piece, “‘God is in the details’... and this maxim is a large part of what could be called animators’ core belief system, or at least aspects of our temperament which attract us to the craft.” Griffin’s contribution reflects back on his 1981 film *Flying Fur*. It is part production history, part reflection on some of the central tenets of animation itself. *Flying Fur* is a strange, frenetic beast, the images drawn by Griffin while listening to the soundtrack of an unknown cartoon he had never seen (it turned out to be *Puttin on the Dog*, a 1944 Tom and Jerry). The result? Probably one of the purest examples of “cartoon energy” I have ever seen, a critique of cartoon violence, and an oblique (and very funny) deconstruction of the relationship between sound and image in the animation production process. Often the soundtrack is laid down first and the images matched to it—Griffin takes this to some kind of (il)logical conclusion.

Sarah Bowen writes about her short film *Dazed*, which uses live action and pixillation, or the frame-by-frame filming of human actors. In this respect, her film work exists on the boundary (or “in-between,” to borrow an animation term) of what are commonly understood to be live action and animation. The themes of dreaming, remembrance and longing are often played out to a startling degree in animation. But, as Bowen points out, there is a specific quality to pixillation that makes it a very interesting technique in relation to human performers. As she says: “In contrast to... drawn, puppet and computer generated animation, where the performances are created by the animator,

in pixillation, performance comes from the actor.” The strangeness of the look of pixillated movements combines with the indexical link to a real human expression.

Penn Stevens offers a detailed account of the thoughts and processes that went into making her computer animated short, *Tied down*. She discusses the specific advantages and disadvantages of working with computers, but clearly sees the computer as a means to an end, a tool. The usefulness of Stevens’ contribution is in the attention to detail in how she designed her character, choreographed the movements, and thought about how best to represent the level of (un)reality required for her chosen narrative. This critical reflection is also very welcome due to its inherent modesty: the author talks about trial and error, her lack of experience but willingness to learn—basically, she attends to the *process* of production in a way that is accessible and yet alive to possible problems, mistakes and changes of direction.

Finally, Richard O’Connor offers an account of a number of recent projects he has worked on as part of Asterisk, a New York City-based production company. These include live action and animation, music videos, advertisements, and a short promotional animation made to plug the remake of *The Stepford Wives* (2004). O’Connor reflects on what it is like to work on a plethora of projects in the commercial sector. Animation is often viewed in a kind of polarised way (alluded to at the beginning of this introduction): hugely popular and mainstream, or independent, experimental and somehow “difficult.” There is of course a massive range of positions between these two, and it is useful that someone like O’Connor can write a piece such as this, which reveals the serious thought that goes into some projects which might otherwise be labelled as frivolous. People who “theorise” can learn a lot from practitioners; the practitioners for their part often know far

more about theory than people give them credit for (or, sometimes, than they let on—as George Griffin’s title “Willful Ignorance” perhaps playfully attests).

¹ See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).