Ryan Pierson, editor

Introduction

Animation no longer sits at the margins of moving image practice. For most of the history of moving images, frame-by-frame manipulation had been relegated to slivers of play within a largely photographic arena: segments of instructionals, special sequences in fantasy or science fiction films, advertisements, and, of course, split-reel cartoons. Now animation is so pervasive as to be practically impossible to separate from recorded motion.[1] Animation's characteristic techniques of manipulating motion frame by frame and manipulating space layer by layer are essential components of cinema, television, video games, smartphone apps, and internet videos. In the United States alone, there are more than two hundred postsecondary animation programs, not to mention additional programs that include animation instruction, such as graphic design and game design.[2] Major animation festivals are held in Annecy, Ottawa, Zagreb, and Hiroshima, with scores of smaller-scale festivals worldwide. Disney, the studio that has long served as the synecdoche for animation, took in almost a third of all box office revenue in 2019, more than twice as much as any other studio.[3] What had once sat on the periphery of media culture has moved to the center.

A move from the margins to the center has also characterized animation's place in the *study* of moving images. As digital imagery and computer-generated graphics became more pervasive throughout the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century, it became easier for scholars to define the moving image itself by its plasticity rather than by its attach-

1   Suzanne Buchan, introduction to *Pervasive Animation,* ed. Suzanne Buchan (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.
2   See, for example, "Background Info and Criteria for College Rankings," Animation Career Review, accessed January 16, 2021, https://www.animationcareerreview .com/background-info-and-criteria-college-rankings.
3   Adam B. Vary, "Disney Explodes Box Office Records with $11.1 Billion Worldwide for 2019," *Variety*, January 2, 2020, https://variety.com/2020/film/box-office /disney-global-box-office-2019-1203453364/.

ment to reality.[4] In addition, the theatrical feature-film experience began to lose its importance during this time, in comparison to the broader media ecology of sound and image.[5] Animation's very dependence on "minor" forms was a boon here. Whereas cinema exists in a theater, animation exists wherever motion can be technologically rendered. The growth of animation scholarship was thus representative of the shift from cinema studies to cinema *and media* studies.

This shift is not surprising, as critical interest in animation has often followed developments in animation practice. Early trick films such as *Le garde-meubles automatique* (*Automatic Moving Company*, Romeo Bosetti, 1912) inspired poet Vachel Lindsay to postulate "The Motion Picture of Fairy Splendor" in 1915.[6] After cartoon production became industrialized in the mid-1910s, Viktor Shklovsky and Élie Faure posited a future for cinema in the refinement of cartoon techniques.[7] And in the 1930s, Disney's elastic creatures and inventive use of sync sound were celebrated by Sergei Eisenstein, Lewis Jacobs, and many others.[8]

The mid-century saw a change in the way single-frame filmmaking was conceived; taking after art cinema and visual education, the notion of "animation" emerged as an alternative to the cartoon, which inspired further study of the art form. This notion was boosted within postwar film culture by periodicals, film societies, and festivals.[9] By 1960, there was an international organization specifically devoted to the promotion of animation, the Association internationale du film d'animation (ASIFA).

Our current era of theorization of animation is largely a product of three

4   For examples, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," *differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 29–52; and Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's "Quest" and Its Charge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

5   For responses to this development, see Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 438–452; Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); and Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: The Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

6   Vachel Lindsay, "The Motion Picture of Fairy Splendor," in *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 30–38.

7   Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography*, trans. Irina Masinovsky (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), 69–70; and Élie Faure, "The Art of Cineplastics," trans. Walter Pach, reprinted in *Screen Monographs* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1970), 1:9–45.

8   See Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso Books, 2002); and Gregory A. Waller, "Mickey, Walt, and Film Criticism from Steamboat Willie to Bambi," in *The American Animated Cartoon: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 49–57.

9   For examples, see John Hubley and Zachary Schwartz, "Animation Learns a New Language," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1946): 360–363; and André Martin, "Animated Cinema: The Way Forward," *Sight and Sound* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1959): 80–85. For accounts of the transition from cartoons to animation, see Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, "André Martin, Inventor of Animation Cinema: Prolegomena for a History of Terms," trans. Lucy Swanson, in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Beckman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 85–97; Ryan Pierson, "On Styles of Theorizing Animation Styles: Stanley Cavell at the Cartoon's Demise," *Velvet Light Trap* 69 (Spring 2012): 17–26; and Ryan Pierson, "Postwar Animation and Modernist Criticism: The Case of Annette Michelson," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* (forthcoming).

scholarly developments in the late 1980s: the release of the English translation of Eisenstein's notes on Disney, the Illusion of Life conference in Sydney (the proceedings of which were later published as an edited collection), and the founding of the Society for Animation Studies.[10] Save for the Eisenstein publication, these developments were responses to the encroachment of animation into visual culture that was already taking place and would become unavoidable by the twenty-first century.

This dossier has two purposes. The first is to expose nonspecialists to a sample of the range of developments currently happening in animation scholarship. The second is to bring marginal phenomena to the center again—this time, phenomena *within* animation studies itself.

Since becoming a subfield, animation studies has been able to pursue a number of topics, including non-Western industries (especially Japanese), animation and race, animated documentary, and commissioned (or "useful") animation.[11] Despite this variety, however, animation studies has still had a difficult time expanding beyond the American studio cartoon. Those qualities that were first noted in American cartoons—their apparent negation of photography and real-world physics as well as their oft-repeated themes of objects coming to life—are sometimes hypostatized into a universal essence of animation.[12] This tendency has kept the American cartoon at the center of animation studies, as the default assumption of what animation "is."

The essays in this dossier propose a series of alternatives to that assumption. Taken together, they suggest that the most enabling way for animation studies to go forward is to assume that animation has no essence. What happens if, instead of focusing on animation's potential for rendering fantasy worlds, we take as primary its capacity for the graphic reduction of information—if we take animation as a medium for conveying concepts? What happens if we take animation's aesthetic possibilities primarily as technical matters of visual experimentation rather than as diegetic matters of impossible physics? If we shift our focus to animation industries that are almost entirely unfamiliar to Western audiences? If we don't assume a principled separation between the animated world and the photographed world? The following essays demonstrate that those phenomena that appear to lie at the

10 See Alan Cholodenko, ed., *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1991).

11 For examples, see Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Masao Yokota and Tze-yue G. Hu, eds., *Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Malcolm Cook and Kirsten Moana Thompson, eds., *Animation and Advertising* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). For an expansive list of sources on non-Western animation and issues of race in animation, see Mihaela Mihailova, "An Anti-Racist Animation Syllabus," *Fantasy/Animation*, accessed January 18, 2021, https://www.fantasy-animation.org/current-posts/2020/6/19 /antiracist-animation-syllabus.

12 For an assessment of this tendency, see Donald Crafton, "The Veiled Genealogies of Animation and Cinema," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6, no. 2 (2011): 93–110.

margins—of animation studies and film and media studies more broadly—turn out to be vital for understanding the center.

The first two essays, by Scott Curtis and Michelle Kelley, explore useful animation. Scott Curtis argues that animation is a crucial visualization technique for scientists, in research as well as communication. He notes that animation belongs in a "figural" tradition of visualization tools such as charts and diagrams and that its additional component of motion places its own formal demands on scientific work (in biology, for example). Because these formal demands impact the ways scientists imagine their own objects of study, they impact the ways we conceive of the world. Michelle Kelley examines one use of educational animation, the *Fun and Facts about America* series of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, this series was made for the ostensible purpose of educating children on economics; its actual purpose, however, was to promote free market ideals and corporate liberalism. These less-visible uses of animation by private interests make clear how deeply intertwined the projects of "education" and "persuasion" are, in any example of media.

One of the most notable features of animated films, especially independent shorts, is the bewildering variety of visual styles one encounters from film to film. In the next essay, Alla Gadassik sketches a theoretical account of this feature, putting forth a new conception of "apparatuses" in animated work. She offers as a test case the multiplane stand: a layered structure underneath a camera with empty spaces between the layers. For animators working in two-dimensional forms, the camera is pointed down at a flat surface—or, in the case of the multiplane stand, at a stack of surfaces. This makes the perspective of the camera's lens less important than the arrangement of the layers below it, which opens up new possibilities for depicting space. Rather than capturing a spectator in a preexisting set of optical (and social) relations, as apparatus theory has traditionally asserted, the apparatus here becomes an occasion for the animator to offer strange and unforeseen relations—a partner in creation.[13]

While Gadassik's essay is concerned mainly with independent animation, Mihaela Mihailova's essay focuses on the Russian animation industry. More specifically, Mihailova illustrates the need for the Russian animation industry to navigate global trends and domestic audience assumptions and expectations. The *bogatyr* (epic hero) franchise of the early twenty-first century found a way to distinguish itself from dominant CGI realism and successfully compete for box office returns by embracing a flatter visual style and relying on well-known folk stories. Such case studies are crucial for obtaining a more complete picture of animation industries and avoiding Anglocentric conceptions of animation.

The final two essays, by Jordan Schonig and Thomas Lamarre, question the oft-presumed separation between the animated world and our own world. Film studies' conventional vocabulary of visual analysis—such as mise-en-

---

13 See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286–298.

scène, cinematography, and editing—makes it extremely difficult to describe onscreen movements. Schonig argues that animation studies can teach film scholars to describe movements in live-action film with greater precision. Examining the fall of a bowling pin in *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932), Schonig demonstrates that concepts from animation theory can do for even the most basic tools of film scholarship. Lamarre, by contrast, takes issue with how animation scholars tend to think about movement. For most of animation studies, *movement* means the motions of individual figures. Lamarre argues that nonlocalized movement and change—dust in swirling wind or the response of materials to pressure and heat—offer other possibilities for philosophical speculation. Nonlocalized movements encourage us to arrive at what he calls an ecological image of thought: a picture of ourselves as embedded within, rather than divided from, our world.

Ryan Pierson is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication, Media and Film at the University of Calgary. He is the author of *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2020). His articles have appeared in *The Velvet Light Trap*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, and other publications.