ANIMATION DREAM
AND
ANTI-LOGIC

NAOMI WILSON

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

ANIMATION DREAM AND ANTI-LOGIC

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

BY

NAOMI WILSON

MARCH 1988

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INTRODUCTION

Theorists commonly pass over the puppet film, and
animation generally, as a ghetto of exceptions to 'real'
movies. Film-makers and audiences seem to maintain an
ideological view of animation's difference; animation
could do things live-action could not, and hence it came
to be assumed that it should only do these things.

The first production companies for animated films
took place from about 1915- at the same time as the
establishment of the Hollywood motion picture production
system in general. Kristin Thompson, writing on the
Implications of the Cel Animation Technique , argues
that this resulted in animation becoming defined within
relatively narrow boundaries; these boundaries having as
much to do with the developing Hollywood conception of
the animated film as with the actual technical properties
of the mode. Hollywood defined animation by its difference
from live-action films and it has remained considered
as a secondary form ever since. Animation had a value
where it brought the mystery of movie technology to the
fore, impressing people with the 'magic' of cinema;
animation made cinema a perpetual novelty.

> " Hollywood's conception of animation
> has been developed partly as a defence
> against the disruptive properties of

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animation. By trivializing animation,
Hollywood has made it compatable with
the classical cinema as a whole, making
it appeal to the same audience viewing
habits."[1]

The following essay looks at some examples of animated
film work, and at some of the properties of animation
techniques; in what ways might they be said to work for
an audience. Can theories on fantasy/dream/humour/play etc.
be useful in an attempt to recover potentially radical
aspects of some animated film work ? (Film techniques and
technology are not in themselves radical; they can only
become so within the structure of a complete film.) What
might the appropriation of animation techniques by advert-
isers imply in terms of potential novelty effect/potential
relation to processes of unconscious thought ?

" ...the discourse of advertising is itself
constituted by the rhetoric of imagination,
rebellion, creativity and free expression that
was once associated primarily with the figure
of the artist."[2]

The surfaces of our world that the commercial film shows
are so cosmeticised that the viewer must strain his/her
imagination to make any connection between the real and the
hypothetical;

" Hollywood will not help us 'see' if it

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can avoid it, because to see clearly is
to be disturbed by what one sees."[3]

From the position of footnote to cinema, can animation
work recover something for itself in terms of resistance
to dominant modes of representation ? (The following
essay is not an attempt to claim as necessarily subversive
the examples of work discussed, but an attempt to better
understand what the nature of the work might involve.)

" The very simplicity intensifies the
structural paradoxes that could be said
to make animation 'not the eccentric uncle
but the queen of film'."[4]

FOOTNOTES

1

Kristin Thompson, "Implications of the Cel Animation
Technique", The Cinematic Apparatus, p. 103.

2

Laura Kipnis, as quoted by Simon Frith/Howard Horne,
Art into Pop, p. 165.

3

Malcolm Le Grice, Abstract Film and Beyond, p. 277.

4

Raymond Durgnat, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol. 53 no.629
p.189.

FANTASY

There is usually a fundamental objection to considering fantasy in the context of the social and political. Fantasy tends to be associated with areas of 'poetry' and 'visual fallacy'. On one hand 'poetry' invokes a more or less intentional act of imagination; on the other hand 'visual fallacy' implies the unintentional, the hallucinatory. Whatever the case, in popular understanding 'fantasy' is always opposed to 'reality'. In this definition fantasy becomes the negative of reality. Here 'reality' is conceived as that which is external to our 'inner' lives. Within this 'common sense' view, we simultaneously inhabit two distinct histories; one mental/private; the other physical/public. Political and social considerations are seen as belonging to the area of physical/public. In its contemporary everyday use, fantasy is synonymous with 'daydream', or with conscious written narrative construction. Seen in this way, fantasy can be said to invoke a notion of the relation between dream and fiction, without actually theorizing that connection. It may be considered necessary to work through that relationship, to try and distinguish between fantasy as an unconscious structure and as forms of social narrative, in order to break through the stigmatizing moralism which is associated with the notion of fantasy (for example, romantic fantasy is represented as a 'social disease' which affects the weaker constitution of the female psyche). It may be of value to look at in what

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way fantasy might function in the processes of our mental
activities, both in relation to the individual, and to our
interaction as groups.

It may be considered the areas of 'transaction between
the episodes of private history and public history' which
remain 'mysterious'.[1] It is to this mysterious area of trans-
action that psychoanalysis tries to gain access. The theory
of the 'unconscious' can be seen to posit...

"...precisely the idea of another locality,
another space, another scene, the between
perception and consciousness, that space in which
fantasy stages its 'mise-en-scene' of desire."[2]

How does psychoanalysis try to conceive of the position
of the unconscious ? It has been explained as a concept
'forged on the trace of what operates to constitute the
subject'.[3] The unconscious is not seen purely as a simple
division from consciousness. It is not considered as being
in any way 'first'; it does not constitute the subject.

" The operation that constitutes the subject
is that of the order of the symbolic, language
as 'cause of the subject'; and the place of the
symbolic, the locus of its operation, is the
place of the Other. Hence their are two domains;
the subject and the Other, with the unconscious
'between them their active break'...the uncon-

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-scious is the discourse of the Other."[4]

Psychoanalysis is not considered to uncover objective causes 'in' reality so much as it seeks to change our attitudes 'to' that reality.[5] To this end psychoanalytic theory has been used to try and deconstruct the phenomenon of fantasy being 'opposed' to reality. Psychoanalysis attempts to reveal the supposedly marginal operations of fantasy at the centre of all our perceptions, beliefs and actions. The object of psychoanalysis is not the reality of 'common sense', it is more what Freud termed 'psychical reality'. Contrary to psychologism, psychoanalysis recognises no state of total unambiguous or self-possessed lucidity in which the external world may be seen for, and known as, simply 'what it is'.

> " There is no possible 'end to ideologies.' Unconscious wishes, and the fantasies they engender, are as immutable a force in our lives as any material circumstance."[6]

Psychoanalysis at least 'takes the question of pleasure seriously',[7] both in its relation to gender and in its understanding of fiction as fantasies; as the explorations and productions of desires which may be in excess of the socially possible or exceptable.

Within Freud's theory, fantasy is seen to operate at three diferent registers; at unconscious, subliminal and conscious levels. At each level fantasy may be considered

to express social content, but is at the same time separate
from it. In psychoanalytic theory, the infant's fantasy is
the mode through which sexuality/desire is constituted.
Equally,the ability to represent the missing activity or
pleasure is the process through which subjectivity (social
and psychic identity) is formed. A psychoanalytic theory of
fantasy not only takes pleasure seriously, but places the
ability to think about pleasure at the centre of what con-
stitutes us as human subjects.

If we accept that fantasy has a crucial place in mental
life, and if we emphasise it as a process rather than a
particular scenario or set of scenarios, then might it be
possible to see in what way fantasy in incorporated/implic-
ated into the structures of our society, and how this might
relate to the area of cinema ?

> " Fantasy is not the object of desire, but its
> setting.In fantasy the subject does not pursue the
> object of its sign; he appears caught up himself in
> the sequence of images. He forms no representation
> of the desired object, but is himself represented
> as participating in the scene, although in the earl-
> iest forms of fantasy he cannot be asigned any fixed
> place in it...as a result, the subject, although
> always present in the fantasy, may be so in a de-
> subjectivized form, that is to say, in the very
> syntax of the sequence in question." [8]

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When looking at how the notion of 'fantasy' is integrated with the notion of 'reality' in our society it is interesting to look at such divisions as those that are made between 'high' and 'low' culture. Virtually all general sociological accounts of capitalist societies assume a clear distinction between 'high' and 'mass' culture, between the bourgeois world of fine arts, acedemic music, serious literature etc. on the one hand, and the popular world of TV, radio, pop music,'trashy'novels etc on the other. Embedded in the high/mass cultural distinction is the assumption that the meaning of high art is derived from the artists themselves- from their intentions, experience and genius; mass culture meaning lies in its function- to make money, reproduce the social order.(It is arguable that high culture is now a mass cultural myth, a category created by specific state and market forces.[9]) But can in fact, such distinctions be so clearly drawn ?

Postmodernism is a term that has been developed in a variety of different contexts, but it has been suggested that a sense of breakdown between cultural caregories is common to them all.[10] We are supposedly living in a time when all cultural forms draw on the same resources, raid and make mock of each other's histories, are implicated in multimedia tie-ups (the pop video, the book of the film of the book, the image of the advertisement of the image,etc.) Mass consumption can be considered to have a significant

role in the formation of collective identity. In what way
do we become involved in consuming and being consumed (con-
sidered to confirm us most vividly as individuals) in the
high/mass culture (the 'media society'[11]) ? What is the
nature of the role of fantasy in this consumption ?

Cinema might be considered a crossover area between so
called high and mass culture. It has been said, with
regard to cinema, that no art so blatantly offers sexual
satisfaction to its audiences, or requires its performers
to fulfill so precisely the public's communal fantasies.
Because of the physical advantages over the other arts for
involving the audience emotionally and sensority, cinema is
said to cater to private fantasy in a way that other art
forms seldom approach. The acessibility to a mass audience
creates a two-way traffic in myths and sensibilities which
has resulted in the catering for/developing of certain areas
of fantasy (particularly sexual fantasy).

> " The apparently simple act of seeing a film, as
> soon as it is subjected to analysis, it reveals
> to us a complex, interconnected imbrication of
> the functions of the imaginary, the real, and the
> symbolic, which is also required in one form or
> other for every proceedure of social life, but
> whose cinematic manifestation is especially impress-
> ive since it is played out on a small surface."[12]

Questions of cinema and fantasy are very complex. The
person watching a film will always already be inscribed
in practices which have multiple significations. This is
why a film cannot, in and of itself, produce a reading
which 'fixes' the subject. The viewing can be considered
to constitute a point of dynamic intersection, the prod-
uction of a new sign articulated through the plays of
signification of the film and those which already artic-
ulate the subject.

The area of pop music and video etc. perhaps represents
a certain crossover between commercial and 'art' interests.
(Many pop musicians have also been involved in art college etc.)
Recent trends in advertising share many of the techniques
used in film and pop video work. There has been a widespread
increase in the use of animated film techniques in advertising/
TV graphic/pop video work. On what is this current fashion/
trend based ? How might a 'postmodernist' sensibility be
reflected in the use of techniques with a capacity for a
certain free-floating of reference ? The conflict between
the impulse towards naturalization of film on the one
hand and the desire to retain their novelty effect on
the other, confers a considerable value upon the animated
film. Along with comedy, animated film narratives frequently
draw upon fantasy/magic/traditional stories etc. as a
motivation for stylization. This encourages the assumption
that animation is for children, since it ressembles forms
associated   (see fig. 1-2)

with children. The ultimate ideological result of the
assumption that animated film (in particular cartoons)
are for children, is a trivialization of the medium. But
the associations between animated film, fantasy, comedy,
children and play etc. might make it an area worth looking
at in terms of a re-examination/recuperation of those very
aspects. How much is the trivialization of animated film
a result of the trivialization of areas of fantasy in
general (with which it is seen to be connected) ? On what
might these connections be based ? In order to understand
how fantasy might be implicated in processes of film-work,
it may be of value to look at theories of in what ways
film-work may emulate processes of thought.

FOOTNOTES

1
V. Burgin/J. Donald/ C. Kaplan, Formations of Fantasy, p. 1 .

2
Ibid .

3
Ibid, p.2 .

4
Ibid .

5
Ibid, p.3.

6
Ibid,p. 1.

7
Ibid.

8
Ibid .

9
Simon Frith/Howard Horne, Art into Pop, p. 3

10
Ibid, p. 4

11
Ibid

12
Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier, p.57.
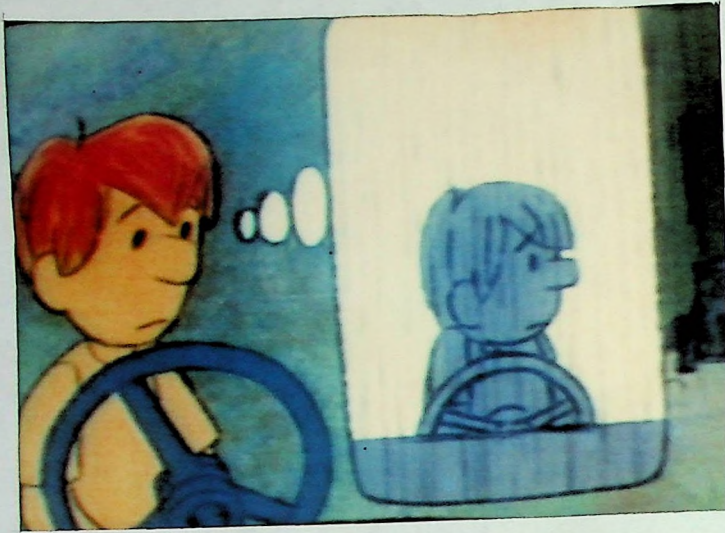
(Fig. 1)
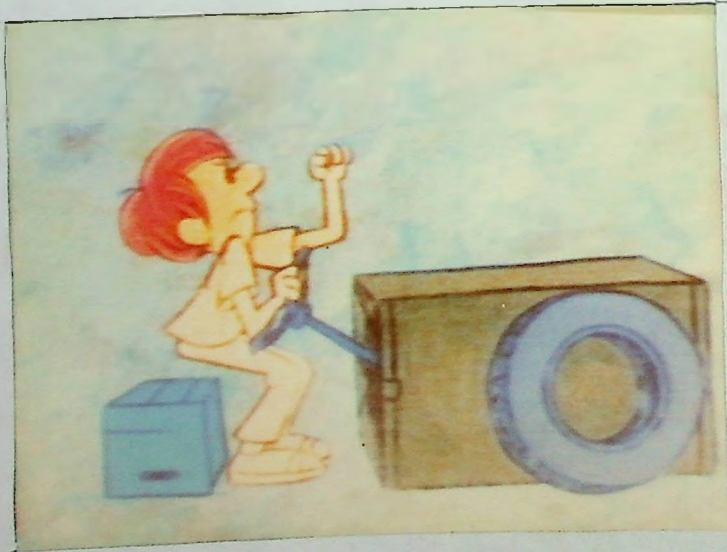
(Fig. 2)

"If artists, art historians and critics are
to benefit from Freudian psychoanalysis in any
way then they must confront the central achievements
of Freud's work and not just his more marginal
writings on art and artists. In order to explain
the way in which dream images are produced, Freud
introduced the concept of dream-work; it is pro-
posed that a comparable concept- art-work- would
be useful in the field of artistic production."[1]

What, if any, might be the similariries between processes
of dream-work and art-work (in particular film and animation
work) ? Dream-work is usually considered an unconscious process
involving internal mental operations, while artistic labour
is a conscious mental process controlling the manipulation
of physical materials and implements. In terms of cinema
spectatorship and processes of dreaming, one principle diff-
erence is that the dreamer does not necessarily know s/he is
dreaming; the film spectator knows that s/he is at the cinema.
However the gap between the two states sometimes seems to
diminish.

The unconscious is also considered to be involved in
processes of art-work production and consumption. John A.
Walker suggests the possibility of paralells between the
unconscious operations of dream-work and the physical trans-
formations typical of artistic production.[2] In his theory

of dream interpretation, Freud sees dream-work as the labour of transposing/translating 'hidden' content(dream-thoughts) into the concrete imagery of the dream content, often distorting it in the process. Freud discusses this labour under such headings as condensation, displacement, means of representation, secondary revision etc. Might these terms be useful when trying to gain an understanding of how certain cinematic techniques work ?

In his theory on dreams, Freud suggests that ecconomy of expression is typical of dreams. Condensation is an important aspect of dreaming. It can also be considered an essential part of many animation techniques, where objects tend to be used to give a more acute sense of descriptive rather than narrative interpretation.[3] The Quay Brothers have said of their puppet animation work...

> " Rather in the way a poster has to convey the
> whole impression of a film, working on a puppet
> scale requires the same kind of immense shorthand."[4]

According to Freudian theory, condensation also plays an essential part in the creation/function of jokes.[5] Freud contrasts jokes with dreams insofar as dreams are 'asocial' mental products which disregard intelligibility; whereas jokes he considers the 'most social of all mental functions', as they only use distortion in the unconscious to the point at which it can be set straight by the third person's understanding. The sharper the sense of condensation or ecconomy of expression in jokes, the keener the sense of

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pleasure we seem to derive from them. The sense of humour
which is often considered an integral part of much animation
work may be attributed to the sense of extreme condensation
that the techniques employed can create. Does the social
aspect of communicating through methods of joke/humour
imply that art-work/film-work might be more related to
processes of joking than to those of dreaming ?

Most animated films are very short (probably due to the
amount of work and expense that they require). This results
in a different approach to film-work (one that is possibly
more related to the short story than the novel). This short
duration makes condensation essential, and the work can
sometimes become very intense. The effect of watching short
snatches of images might be considered dream-like in the
sense of impression that it leaves on the unconscious.

>   " An animistic world is pagan both in its
>   intensity and in its linking of the physical
>   with the human." [6]

In most short film work there is no concession to character
or narrative. (Many dreams only seem to deal in obscure or
short narrative sequences) Much animation (particularly
abstract work) might be described as an implicit search for
a film which functions on the psycho-physical rather than
the psycho-interpretative level. Action on the autonomic
system seeks to create a nervous response which is largely
preconscious. Eggeling's film Diagonal Symphony, hand animated,

was considered important because it showed that narrativity
-the speculative temporal process of film viewing- can take
place without story content or mimetic subject matter. It
was seen as the filmic equivalent of discovering that musical
notes can be beautiful even if not accompanied by or con-
tained in singing.[7]

One of the methods of condensation in dreams, according
to Freud, is when relations of similarity, consonance and
the possession of common attributes between two items are
represented in dreams by unification. He suggests that the
dream-work of condensation often unites the figures of two
or more people into a single dream image; a 'collective
figure'. Walker considers possible pictorial equivalents
of this to be found in mythological and religious hybrid
figures.[8] One of the strongest aspects of animated film-work
is the capacity for assembling and mixing together different
elements, possibly involving contradiction. In work such as
that of the East-European film-makers (Lenica, Borowwczyk,
the early animations by David Lynch etc.) there is a 'gleeful
reversing of the laws of creation' and a combining of
human/animal and machine worlds in 'preposterous and male-
volent allience'.[9] The meaning of any 'collective' figure
will depend on the context within which it is produced/viewed.

Freud uses the analogy of the multiple exposure technique
of photography to explain his theory of the 'composite

figure', which is another means of condensation. He suggests
that in a 'composite' figure certain features common to
both are emphasised, while those which fail to fit in with
one another cancel one another out and become indistinct.
In much advertising work the multiple exposure technique
is exploited in order to suggest links between products,
surrogate consumers and certain human values.[9] Techniques
of collage/montage can imply links between disparate elements
for a viewer. Often the more disjunct the images the harder
a connection between them is sought. This is deliberately
exploited by advertising which adopts a 'surrealist' style,
which is intended to flatter the viewer if s/he makes certain
connections, or if s/he sees it in terms of 'art' reference
and considers that sufficent explaination. This use of 'art'
reference or non-explaination of images is particularly
evident in much TV graphic work, such as the logos for
Music-Television (MTV). The almost exclusive use of animation
for these logos testifies to the extent to which animation
is seen as 'the' current trend, as far as appealing to the
'youth' mass audience of the pop world.(see fig.3-8) There
seems to be in some respects a merger of the the visual
(and avant-garde) rhetoric of art and advertising.

    " Cultural production has been driven back inside

      the mind, within the monadic subject; it can no

      longer look directly out of its real eyes at the

      real world for the referent but must, as in Plato's

cave, trace its mental images of the world on
its confining walls."[10]

Images can be combined together in different ways and with
varying degrees of synthesis. When two figures are combined
in such a way that both are equal in power an ambiguous
figure is produced; that is one which is capable of a double
meaning or signification (alternatively, the viewer may
project two different meanings onto a single signifier).
The capacity of certain animation techniques for metamorphosis
can allow for images/meanings to be transposed on top of
each other in rapid sucession. The rapid sucession of images
can become to some extent hypnotising or transfixing, making
it a useful device in terms of advertising. Rapid editing
is also used (as opposed to metamorphosis) as a device for
exploiting our capacity to take in, and ascribe some kind
of sense to, a large amount of images in a very short amount
of time.[11] This device, particularly evident in pop videos,
is used to the point where it almost becomes physically
exhausting for the eyes to keep watching for any length of
time. The multi-image capacity of animation techniques would
perhaps explain the increase in use of animation in our
image-saturated culture. Is the increasing complexity of
our society being reflected in the increasing complexity
with which we find it being represented ?

Human perception is an active process; when viewers are

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confronted by vague, indeterminate shapes or rows of dots etc. they tend to 'project' organisation and meaning onto them. There is often a compulsion to discover figurative elements in shapes that may not have been consciously designed as such. There can also be a tendency for people to imbue inanimate objects etc. with life/human qualities. (This is most apparent in the playing of children.) The nature of this playing might be considered the core of many animation techniques (and might explain to some extent the allocation of animation to the area of children's programmes). The organising of elements (as a compositional method) with their own autonomous meanings into a figure of greater complexity which has a meaning different from that of its constituant parts, can be said to duplicate the tendency of human perception to organise separate stimuli into patterns, wholes whose sum is greater than their parts (what Gestalt psychologists call 'grouping'). Advertising relies on our ability to do this, for their juxtaposing of elements to make any sense to us at all.

Freud suggests that one of the ways in which we make sense of relationships between elements is through the processes of transformation. He suggests that causal relationships can be represented in dream-work by one person/thing being transformed into another. He maintains that causal relation is only taken seriously if the transformation actually occurs before our eyes. He also suggests that 'causation is rep-

-resented by temporal sequence'. Sequence is an integral
part of all film work. It can be argued that this narrows
the flexibility of meaning to some extent, but it can allow
for complex transformation/illustration of causal relation-
ships. Literal transformation/metamorphosis is often employed
as a technique in animated film work; does this imply that
causal connections might be asserted in a persuasive manner [13]
because the transformations actually 'occur before our eyes'?

Freud claimed that displacement facilitates representation.
In his dream theory, he discusses his ideas on dream-work
in terms of displacement. This he describes as happening
when an abstract expression in the dream-thought is exchanged
for a pictorial/concrete one. Walker suggests an equation
between this and the process by which the artist uses imagery
to express abstract ideas/thoughts etc. All representation
necessitates some form of displacement. All representation
is re-representation; a production/construction of positions
and effects. Because there is no attempt to simulate reality
in animated film, objects or characters become more obvious
signs of themselves, often making the transposing (displacing)
of ideas/meanings onto the objects more literal or exaggerated.
This meaning is not there 'in' the work, but is constructed
by the viewer. With most animation, again because of the
lack of simulated reality, to make sense of the work the
viewer has perhaps to take a more consciously active role
in constructing meanings. This might account for the type
of engagement that certain animation techniques can stimulate.

(This potential for engagement itself perhaps accounts for some of the appropriation of these techniques by advertisers.)

Displacement also facilitates condensation. Dreams are thought to frequently combine into a single scene material scattered from throughout the dream-thoughts. Walker suggests the similarity between this and the combining pictorially in art-work of elements that historically or logically would never appear together at one time. This juxtaposing contributes to condensation.

> " Both dreams and pictures represent 'logical
> connection by simultaniety in time'."[14]

In Freud's theories, he suggests that there is a discrepancy between the outstanding features of dream-content and those of dream-thought. This he considers to be the result of the influence of the mental agencies of censorship and repression. The result is the representation of 'forbidden' material in a distorted, disguised or indirect form. In the process of dream formation, Freud argues that there occurs a transference or displacement of 'psychical intensities'; minor or trivial details of a dream can become important because significant dream-thoughts may have been displaced onto them.

Walker suggests that in some instances displacement operates in art-work at an unconscious level, and other times at a conscious one, where an artist might deliberately place

important elements in the marginal areas of his/her work.
Freud maintained that dreams make use of symbolism for
disguised representation. He notes that although the presence
of symbols in dreams can supposedly facilitate their inter-
pretation, it becomes difficult because symbols can have
multiple meanings and are therefore often ambiguous. Walker
suggests that when artists employ symbols it is in order to
make their meaning clear. Allegory, for example, is sometimes
used as a means of expressing social/political critisism.
Can the animated world be in any way seen in terms of
allegory to the 'real' world ? Is it possible for indirect
methods of critisism to sometimes evade censorship ?[15]

In Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, he talks about dreams
in relation to distortion. Pictorial representations are
often judged to be distorted. What corelation, if any, might
there be between these two kinds of distortion ? Every
judgement that a picture is distorted implies that some
unstated norm has been violated. In everyday experience there
can often seem to be discrepancy between our knowledge of
how we think things are, and how they appear to be. Conflicts
between cognition and perception can occur. Confidence in
the 'normality' of the world is maintained by disregarding
information which shows discrepancy. Walker suggests a
similarity between the function of censorship operating in
regard to information (particularly optical), and that
operating in regard to dream-work; the prevention of anxiety

or 'other forms of distressing effect'. Where does animated
film stand in relation to representing the 'normality' of
the world ? Is the basic premise of all animated work that
the world be represented in an 'ab-normal' fashion ? Stop-
motion techniques (whether in drawing or puppet/object
animation), by their very nature, give rise to different
senses of movement/perspective/atmosphere etc, a different
sense of real/unreal. Do senses of unreality in animated
film bear any relation to senses of unreality in dreams ?

Because animation stands in a secondary relation to the
world, it can often display discrepancies between cognition
and perception, and can produce distress, anxiety or laughter
in the viewer. Artists have a choice; they can either make
attempts to harmonize their representations with the norms
operative within their culture (naturalism), or they can
deliberately exploit the anxiety-generating discrepancies
for expressive or rhetorical purposes. Distortion becomes
part of the language of visual imagery; in particular, part
of the language of animated film.

> " The essential structural situation of film-makers
> has little to do with their ability to capture
> moments on film; they are makers of experience
> more than recorders of them." [16]

Advertising often makes use of distortion to shock/amuse
its audience. Is there a sense in which distortion can be
used to try and produce/represent states of mind, a

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'psychological reality' ?

> " Often we come across images that, had we
> invented them would be called surreal, but
> they are part of the ordinary everyday. They
> heighten the whole idea of pathological symbolism
> and draw our attention to details or thoughts
> that might otherwise go unnoticed."[17]

In his writing on dreams, Freud proposed that the dream
is the fulfillment of a wish. He says that often the 'psychical
mechanisms of censorship' prevent the wish from expressing
itself except in a distorted form. Distortion, by means of
condensation, displacement, interuption and obscurity would
therefore function as a 'mask' for the wish. However, many
dreams seem to manage to evade the 'agencies of censorship'
(if such angencies exist) and essert their wishes, if wishes
is what they are. Elements of fantasy/wish can be read into
most art-work/film-work. Are films to be read in terms of
symptoms from which to work back to/through the film-maker's
own particular neorosis/obsessions etc ? Do obscure images
function as a method of expressing repressed wishes, as an
attempt to facilitate or to resist a 'wish' ? Talking about
obscurity in relation to their films, the Quay Brothers speak
about obscurity as being in respect to expectation.

> " Sometimes we have to counter charges that our
> work is obscure, particularly in England.(This is
> probably partly because it is inspired by European

literature and cinema). Perhaps the English find
the absense of the familiar unsettling in our
films. English film is usually about identification
of character, just as in art the dominant mode is
portrait painting. People look at English cinema
the way they look at English paintings; for moral
judgements, which we don't feel qualified to make."[18]

Freud also talks about the concept of 'secondary revision'.
He considers this a process that occurs during dream-work
and also during waking hours when a dream is being remembered.
This operation, he suggests, is a kind of editing; it censors,
unifies rationalizes and seeks to make the content of dreams
intelligible. Walker suggests a parallel between this process
and the final stages in which an art-work is completed. A
certain revision might take place, where disparate elements
are synthesized, unified or changed etc.

The kind of intervention that secondary revision makes in
dreams, according to Freud, would be the reflexive remark-
'this is only a dream'. Devices are sometimes employed in
art-work where the artificial, constructed or conventional
nature of the work is foregrounded (in film, for example,
the device which tells the viewer 'this is only a film'etc.).
In most animated film, the techniques create a strong sense
of artificiality. Animation deals in making the impossible
possible, and is therefore a constant site of contradiction.

In his article on the work of the Quay Brothers, Philip
Strick writes;

> "The omnipresent voice of the teller of dark
> tales is paralleled in animation by the ever-
> present hand of the artist/manipulator. The Quay
> Brothers make full use of the characteristic
> jerky action of marionattes to emphasise their
> manipulations. This stylization also suggests
> the function and power of the mask; to invest
> the wearer with a role which can be repeated as
> an endless ritual. The marvellous is full of
> potential for many forms of animation."[19]

Is the work of condensation/displacement/distortion etc. more
apparent in animated film ? What kind of response is evoked
by the fact of a heightened and acknowledged 'artificiality' ?

> " The Street of Crocodiles, where we use doll forms
> and comparitively realistic faces, attempts to
> blur the distinction between what might be called
> artificiality and artificaial reality. Our aim is
> to create a state of suspension where the effect,
> if it works for an audience, is not unlike
> dreaming, albeit dreaming uneasily."[20]

Considering Freud's writings/theories on the nature of dream-
work, and Walker's appropriation of Freud's ideas in relation
to the production of art-work, is it possible to suggest
a relation between states of dream and states of film-work?

What then would be the nature of interaction between the
'dreaming' of the film-maker and the 'dreaming' of the
film spectator ? As the most fundamental 'breakdown' of
the medium of film (frame by frame stop-motion technique)
can an understanding of the processes of animation be
considered relevant to an understanding of the medium of
film itself , and what recourse, if any, it might have
in other processes of thought. If implicated in the work
of film, can thought processes be used/considered in a
potentially disruptive manner ?

FOOTNOTES

1

John A Walker, "dream-work and Art-work", Leonardo ,vol.16
no. 2 p.109.

2

Ibid.

3

Raymond Durgnat, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.53 no.629, p.189.

4

Brothers Quay, "Picked up Pieces", Monthly Film Bulletin,
vol.53 no. 629, p.164 .

5

Freud, as referred to by J.A. Walker, "DReam-work and
art-work", Leonardo , vol.16 no.2 p.110.

6

Charles Eidsvik, Cineliteracy: Film among the Arts, p.49.

7

Malcolm Le Grice, Abstract Film and BEyond, p.46.

8

Richard Combs, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol. p. 102

9

J.A. Walker, "Dream-work and Art-work",Leonardo vol.16
no. 2 p.110.

10

Jameson, as refered to by Simon Frith/howard Horne,
Art into Pop, p.6.

11

Experiments in flashing subliminal messages on the screen
for advertising purposes have apparently been worryingly
sucessful.

12

J.A. Walker, "Dream-work and Art-work", Leonardo, vol. 16
no. 2 , p. 112.

13

Ibid.

14

Ibid.

15

    The film-maker/animator, Jan Svankmajer is employed by
the official studios in Czechoslovakia (where surrealism
has been said to have taken on a subversive role in recent
years) where it is through the 'black holes' opened up
by the state system, with its complex disorder of censor-
ship, its inefficiency and bureaucracy, that he films have
been able to emerge.

16

    Charles Eidsvik, <u>Cineliteracy; Film among the Arts</u>, p. 40.

17

    The Brothers Quay, "Picked up Pieces", <u>Monthly Film Bulletin</u>,
vol. 53 no.629, p.164.

18

    Ibid, p.165.

19

    Roger Hoake, <u>Monthly Film Bulletin</u>, vol.53 no.629, p221.

20

    The Brothers Quay, "Picked Up Pieces", <u>Monthly Film Bulletin</u>,
vol.53 no.629, p.164.

(Fig. 3)

(Fig. 4)

33

(Fig. 5)

(Fig. 6)

(Fig. 7)

(Fig. 8)

ANTI-LOGIC

The attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct meaning has
become an important aspect of all feminist practices.
Interestingly, when the world 'animates' against a woman
the scenario becomes, more often than not, heavily sexualized
and unfunny. This tendancy (which runs through nearly all
areas of patriarchal culture) needs to be examined. The
areas of reason and logic which perpetuate the status quo
need to be questioned.

" Reality proceeds according to the laws of reason,
no longer committed to the dream language."[1]

The areas of dream/unconscious etc. have been seen in terms
of denial of /resistance to the confines of the 'reality
principle'. According to Marcuse, Freud singled out phantasy/
imagination as the one mental activity that retains a high
degree of freedom from the reality principle even in the
sphere of the developed consciousness. Marcuse suggests that
the establishment of the reality principle causes a division
of the mind; the ego becomes guided by only part of its mental
energy; reason becomes unpleasant but useful and correct.
Phantasy remains pleasant but becomes useless, untrue, mere
play, daydreaming. He claimed that in its refusal to accept
the limitations imposed by the reality principle, in its
refusal to forget what can be, lies the critical function
of fantasy.[2]

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If areas of imagination/phantasy are to be realized in areas of art-work, can art-work then become involved in a the negation of the reality principle? It is within this negation that feminism needs to find/open up spaces from which to operate.

Adorno claimed that art survives only where it cancels itself, where it becomes surrealistic and atonal.[3] Is the opposition of fantasy to the reality principle more involved in sub-real or surreal processes, such as dreaming, day-dreaming, play, the 'stream of consciousness' ? The sense that film could do things impossible in other media underlay much early film art. Some film-makers have sought to develop the medium as an area in which 'film-thought' can take place, rather than a tool for the expression of literary ideas. The main problem in asking about meaning in this context is that most of our conceptions of meaning, and the critical language with which we define it, is derived from literary habits.

With animation work, inovation in form is often linked to inovation in technique. There is no simple separation between aesthetics and technique. Not only is animation by its nature a slow and laborious process, but its equipment at a professional level is extremely costly; almost all film-makers who have chosen to work through

animation have been forced to improvise and therefore
often innovate new techniques.

Through the use of specifically cinematic techniques,
animated film can be considered to have the capacity to
'make strange'. Is there a value to be seen in the ability
of certain animation work to represent as possible the
impossible, to represent the illogical, to defy logic ?
In the foregrounding of psychological 'states of mind'
can certain animated film work be seen in terms of an
attempt to negate the representation of 'reality' as being
concerned with the domination of logic and reason ? In its
resistance to logic, can anti-logic open symbolically a
space in which there can be potentially something else ?

> " Often misunderstanding is essential to
> real understanding. Misunderstanding, that
> is, the creating of a new meaning rather than
> the grasping of an old one, is probably an
> essential part of both perceptive and
> creative thought. "[4]

FOOTNOTES

[1]

Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 151.

[2]

Ibid, p. 157.

[3]

Adorno, as referred to by Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 177.

[4]

Charles Eidsvik, Cineliteracy: Film Among the Arts, p. 37.

THE BROTHERS QUAY

" Our aim is to create a state of suspension
where the effect, if it works for an audience,
is not unlike dreaming, albeit dreaming uneasily." [1]

A somewhat discrepit caretaker enters an equally discrepit
museum, and (by accident or design) lets his saliva fall
into a kinetoscope machine. Inside the machine mechanisms
begin to turn over, wires run around pulleys, and flaps
and hatches open. The puppet figure of a man is conjured into
motion. The wires from which he hangs are severed, and he
begins an exploration of the 'street of crocodiles'; a suite
of derelict rooms in which screws turn of their own volation
at his approach, and ice cubes melt backwards. He observes
robotic figures in a strange workshop, and also a boy, who
is also observing. He eventually finds himself disected,
remodelled (his head stuffed with cotton wool) and reclothed
in the inner recesses of a dubious tailoring establishment.

This film, The Street of Crocodiles, is based on the writings
and drawings of the almost forgotten Polish artist, Brunoschulz
(1892-1942), whose death came at the hands of the Nazis in
the Drohobycz ghetto. As a film it almost entirely resists
analysis at a narrative level. It may be considered a measure
of the deliberate inconclusiveness that the live action at
the beginning is overlaid with a caption- ' Prelude; the

wooden oesophagus', which is not followed by any further
chapter captions, as it would imply. The closing quotation is
from Brunoschulz, spoken in his native Polish (and written
in English), and it helps to put the film's sense of
incompleteness into perspective.(See fig. 9) From this
quotation it would seem than Brunoschulz was aiming at a
satire on civic bureaucracy. In the film the Brothers Quay
seem to concentrate on images of impotence, paronoia and
despair. Images such as screws unscrewing themselves out of
everything, a watchface falling apart to reveal an inside
of red meat (see fig. 14), a dolls head being stuffed with
cotton wool, an ice cube melting backwards (see fig.16),
a dandelion being blown backwards etc. might be considered
to create a sense of unease, or a resistance to logic similar
to the sense of dreaming. The Brothers Quay have been con-
sidered as being to some extent involved in surrealist and
expressionist traditions. The character in Street of Crocodiles
carries with him a striped box (a reference to the striped
box in Un chien Andalou ?) which contains not a striped collar
or a severed hand, but an equally phallic giant screw, which
has equally disturbing effects when removed to the base of
a tailor's dummy. The film's terms of reference seem mostly
to come from the 1920's and 1930's. In much of the work by
the Brothers Quay, the juxtaposing of objects/images/references
might be considered dreamlike; in the way that dreams can
mix references from as far back as childhood with references
to a thought from the previous day etc.   Because

cinema deals literally in the 'trace' of an object, it
seems particularly suitable for imitation of the way in
which memory itself seems to function.

> "The difference between theatre and cinema lies
> in the fact that cinema consists of 'images', the
> perceptions offered to the eye are inscribed in a
> photographed space. Everything is recorded (as
> a memory trace which is immediately so, without
> having been something else before) and this is
> still true if what is recorded is not a story
> and does not aim for the fictional illusion
> proper."[2]

Puppet animation, such as that by the Brothers Quay, might
be said to be qualified to give meaning to the generalized
concept of the 'kafkaesque'.[3] Because of their capacity
for concrete abstractions or metaphors endowed very literally
with life, their animations can be said to come close to
the 'kafka' method. The use of puppets can create 'one
long alienation effect'.[4] A sense of paranoid vision which
sees life as an endless, impenetrable bureaucracy can be
well rendered in the found materials and puppetry of the
Quay Brothers' animation; a world of arbitrary bits and
pieces where 'the tawdry, the pathetic, the strange and
the intimidating' freely intermingle.[5] In animation there
is the 'topsy-turvey' business of making inanimate objects
into animate, and animate into inanimate. The Street of

Crocodiles has been likened in feeling to The Trial , where
human thought, reason and order has institutionalised its
own life away.

The obscure by-ways of the East European tradition with
which the Brothers Quay align themselves has been called
'post Kafka surrealism with Victorian Gothic spasms' In[7]
The Terror of Art, Martin Greenburg distinguishes between
Kafka's 'dream-narratives', which represent the major part
of his work, and which would relate to work such as Street
of Crocodiles, and what he calls 'thought stories', which
have virtually ceased to be narratives at all, and have
become a kind of thinking in images; imaginative reasonings
in which an image is represented not in the usual way, but
at it were 'excogitated'. When looking at the relation of
thought and language, Vygotsky maintains that inner speech
enters the arguement in terms of a kind of monitoring of
thought as 'the living process of the birth of thought in
the word/image' [8].

> " One reason why our work doesn't deal in
> narrative is that the form doesn't lend
> itself readily to character and dialogue
> in the usual sense. Puppet animation is much
> closer to dance and music which are our
> biggest sources of inspiration. Music has
> its own laws which narrative could never
> begin to shape itself towards. The approach

to narrative. the obscurity of narrative you
can carry off in music and dance, the relation-
ship of movement to music, the range of music
in dance, all these propel our work far more
than conventional cinema. In Street of Croco-
diles the music shaped powerfully the direction
we took."[9]

The Brothers Quay have been described as 'masters of bricollage'
both in their use of found objects and material for making
their 'puppets', and also in their selection of subject matter
and style. For a programme on Channel Four which was to be
devoted to the work of Czechoslovakian animator, Jan Svank-
majer[10], the Brothers Quay (together with Keith Griffith)
put together a series of animated sequences showing a puppet
Svankmajer at work. The scenes refer variously to the import-
ance of objects/the'radical and subversive role of humour'in[11]
Svankmajer's work; and to the transformation and bizarre
combinations made possible through use of the specifically
cinematic techniques of animation, in which they themselves
take part.

In the first, Pins for Loose Geographies , various objects
pin oint Prague as Svankmajer's home and establish its
relationship with Paris. Next, in The Atelier of Svankmajer-
XVIIth and XXth Centuries Simultaneously: an unexpected visitor,
the puppet Svankmajer, whose head is literally stuffed with
books and whose arms are graphic instruments, receives a
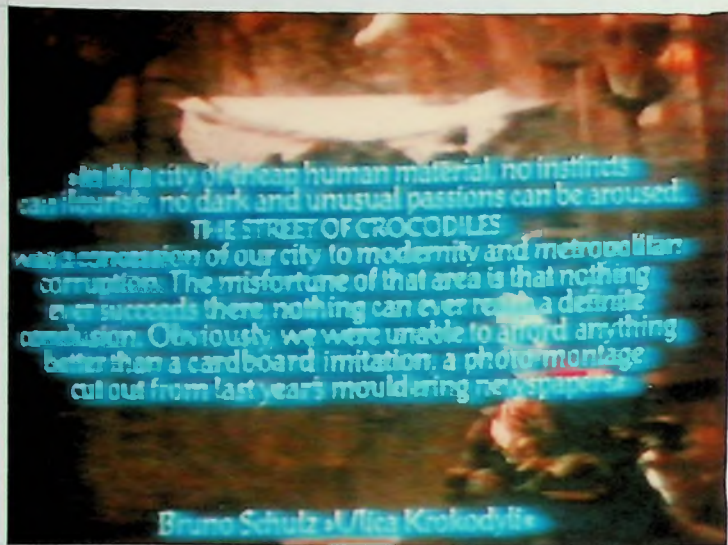visitor, a young boy, whose head he literally empties of

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rubbish. In Pursuit of the Object, Svankmajer rummages about
in a room which is completely lined with drawers, all full
of objects which seem to have a bizarre life of their own.
In The Wunderkammer, the child reveals a whole series of
drawers within drawers. As the search continues, the walls
move in. Eventually the 'object' is found in an inner recess.
In The Migration of Forms, Svankmajer takes scraps of paper
from one drawer and they reappear as birds from another. In
Metaphysical Playroom: a Tactile Experiment, objects continue
to defy the laws of gravity and the child conceals a large
spider in a box, asking Svankmajer to guess the nature of
the object by touching it. In Tarentella : The Child Receives
A Lesson In $\frac{1}{4}$ of A Second, the boy learns how and why objects
can behave in such strange ways. Finally in For a New Dawn,
the boy leaves Svankmajer's studio, but not before the hole
in his head has been filled with a new eye and a book.

The use of texture and visual rhythms is an important part
of their method of working; the narrative is often fragmentary
and repetitive; the mood one of frustration and compulsion.
The animator/artist is inevitable a 'foreign element' in
the work; 'the practicioner of an exiles cinema'[12] , taking
frankensteinian shortcuts between life and non-life, between
the familiar and the strange. Puppetry is perhaps especially
appropriate for the pathos of aspirations to the mechanization
of art. The overall sense of the work can be like the overall
sense of a dream, where you are not quite sure what is going
on but you know that something is wrong.

" At worst we think of ourselves as merely
rummaging for lost or obscure footnotes
in half-forgotten alleys of music and liter-
ature. Our work involves a lot of scavanging.
Our work is systematic only in its randomness
and much of the result is chance. In a curious
way, this haphazard process of discovery-
which with luck can lead to strange unearthings-
is one of the few sanctions left." [13]

FOOTNOTES

1

The Brothers Quay, "Picked up Pieces", _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.164.

2

Malcon Le Grice, _Abstract Film and Beyond_, p.43.

3

Richard Combs, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.219.

4

Raymond Durgnat, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.189.

5

Richard Combs, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.219.

6

The Trial, written by Franz Kafka, remains unfinished, appearing only after his death, in 1925.

7

Tony Raynes, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.163.

8

Vygotsky, as referred to by David Bordwell, _Screen_, vol.15 no.4, p.209.

9

The Brothers Quay, "Picked Up Pieces", _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.165.

10

The work of Jan Svankmajer is discussed in the following section.

11

Julian Petley, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.189.

12

Richard Combs, _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.219.

13

The Brothers Quay, "Picked Up Pieces", _Monthly Film Bulletin_, vol.53 no.629, p.164.

In that city of cheap human material, no instincts can flourish, no dark and unusual passions can be aroused. THE STREET OF CROCODILES was a concession of our city to modernity and metropolitan corruption. The misfortune of that area is that nothing ever succeeds there, nothing can ever reach a definite conclusion. Obviously, we were unable to afford anything better than a cardboard imitation, a photo-montage cut out from last year's mouldering newspapers.

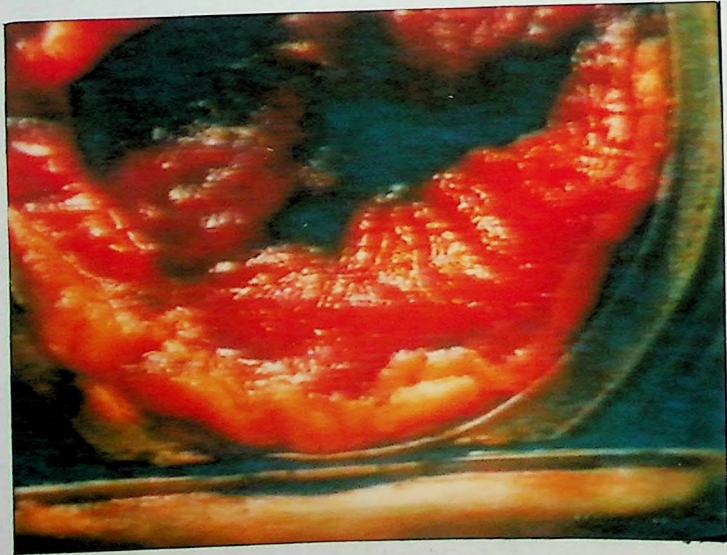Bruno Schulz »Ulica Krokodyli«

(Fig. 9)

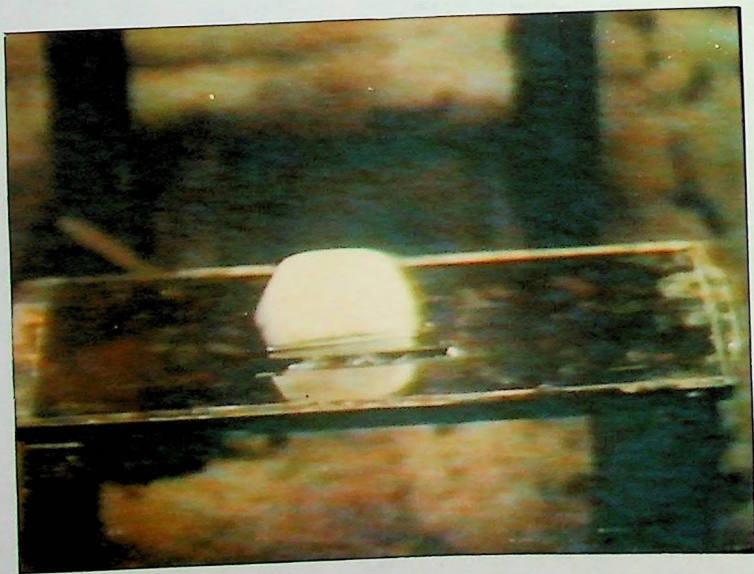(Fig. 10)

(Fig. 13)

(Fig. 14)

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(Fig. 15)

(Fig. 16)

JAN SVANKMAJER

Along with Jan Lenica and Waleriah Borowczyk, the Czech
Jan Svankmajer is considered one of the key animators to
have emerged in East Europe since the war.[1] Like his Polish
contemporaries, his work owes a good deal to Dada and
Surrealism. It also is said to carry more contemporary
resonances of the Theatre of the Absurd. In Svankmajer's
case the link with surrealism is particularly strong, and
his work has been considered 'set within a psychoanalytic
framework! It is said that he has produced some of the
most savage and disturbing work of any contemporary film-
maker in his field. The imagery is described as violent,
witty,disturbing in its transformation and juxtapositions
of objects, materials and beings.[2] His use of humour is
black, and his use of editing is sharp. For Westerners,
the films don't fit readily into any tradition, genre or
film category.

> " To describe him simply as an animator would
> be misleading. His use of puppets and trick
> photography signals roots and references and
> an aesthetic which, at first, are deeply per-
> plexing."[3]

Svankmajer's obsessions include effigies, disembowelments
and bodily ruptures, canibalism, disgorgements, surrealist
lists and a macabre wit. He is distinguished by his trick
photography with objects, particularly dolls, and the ease

with which he moves from the innocence of objects in animation
to images of uncally violence (blood seeps from a performing
penknife/ an apple falls and immediately disintegrates
into a maggot-ridden pulp...) The whole of his work has been
described as a denial of dialogue, a retreat into the
ordered chaos of artefacts and natural objects. His connections
with surrealism seem more important to him than any with
the cinema.

> " The work induces a kind of critical and
> cultural trauma..."[4]

Dimensions of Dialogue, consists of 'chapters of dialogue'.
In Eternal Dialogue, a vaguely human-shaped figure consisting
of cutlery, crocery, kitchen utensils, devours another made
of fruit and vegetables. The two merge and reform, vomitihg
forth pieces which regroup into a similarly shaped figure.
Crocery and cutlery are then swallowed by a body consisting
of stationary, paints, graphic intruments etc. with the
same result as before. This process continues, componants
being steadily reduced to sludge and each result looking
more human; until finally a perfect human head emerges and
vomits forth its likeness, this process continuing until
the action fades.

In Passionate Dialogue, a male and female figure touch, mingle
and then merge. When they reform a little piece of matter
is left over. It tries unsucessfully to rejoin, but ends up

being thrown between the two figures who are soon tearing
each other to pieces in exasperation.

In **Exhausting Dialogue** , a lump of matter emerges from a
table drawer and forms itself into two heads. From the mouth
of one emerges a toothbrush, from the other a tube of tooth-
paste, and so on through bread/butter, shoe/lace, pencil/
sharpener etc. The combinations start to become mismatched;
butter spread on shoes/ sharpeners attempting to sharpen
each other etc. until the clashing of items becomes grot-
esque and frenzied and the two heads crack and dissolve
in exhaustion.

In Svankmajer's work there is what might be considered an
'exploration of animated objects'. A sense of 'brutal realism'
prevents his fantasies from collapsing into 'whimsical' or
conventional surrealist imagery. The 'plot' might be said
to relate/ or be constructed around the free flow of dream
and association. His work is also rooted in the 'reality' of
objects, their texture, malleability, physical properties;
Svankmajer has said that he does not rape the objects he uses,
but selects them for some natural property which he then
developes. The concept of 'raping objects' is an interesting
one, especially with regard to underlying attitudes that
might be complicit in methods of working such as animation.

If Svankmajer's work can be seen to comment on the nature
of human relationships, can it also be a comment on the

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psychology of the orality of aggression and love ? Can the
aspects of fantasy/imagination in such work be of interest
in terms of areas of psychoanalysis ? Much animation work
is more involved in description than in narration as such.
Work such as Svankmajer's might be seen as attempting to
map the way we create felt concepts in life.

But can the film-maker provide an experience simply by
'replacing' real life with images of real life ? Gombrich
argues that artistic images do not replace experiental ones;
rather they become them.Just as in child's play a few blocks
becomes a train, elements in art 'become' life-like. A
piece of wood can become a horse; the wood does not ressemble
a horse; it becomes a horse's essential features, the most
essential of which is rideability. 'A real horse would be
a poor playmate, especially in the kitchen'[5] . In art too
the made image can sometimes work better than the origonal
could.

> " The history of art indicates that real life
> is a Medusa's head that can be looked at only
> through mirrors provided by expressive images."[6]

Drawing on the experiences of childhood (that 'mobile swamp
of memories'as Svankmajer has described it) Svankmajer (himself
described as 'a conjuror in the imaginary theatre of childhood')
uses his objects as a language. In his work there can be
seen a struggle against the 'decay of imagination in the
ordered logic of adult existence'[7]. The methods of animation

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might be considered to echo the methods of playing itself.
There is much debate over the exact reasons for play, but
it is considered that unless anxiety is so great that all
play is inhibited, the wishes and conflicts of each devel-
opmental stage will be reflected in the child's play,
directly or by substitute symbolic activities. Also. feelings
may be expressed openly in play. In most kinds of playful
activity, it is knowledge of, rather than belief in,
conventions that counts.

> " Because attitudes to conventions are unfixed
> and open to variation, conventions themselves
> have no fixed meanings, and the playing out of
> formulaic anticipations can satisfy in an indef-
> inite number of ways."[8]

How might this relate to the sense of ultimate control/
ultimate possibility nature of the animated film ? Because
the image is dynamic, even objects can become animated, and
often seem animistically, mythically alive. This has
importance in two ways; first it is a different state than
ordinary life provides (the camera world separates the
screen image from the world of normal perception); secondly
it turns the objects of the screen world into 'animistic'
elements. When a child turns a piece of wood into a horse,
part of the pleasure comes from this act of animation. So
much of play involves personification or animation of
objects that one might suspect that animation is integral
to playfulness. The act of seeing things 'come alive' is
part of the pleasure in perceptual behaviour. Moving

pictures provide more than moving pictures; they provide
a totally alive world.

> " The artist celebrates man's ability to
> survive all the complexity and uncertainty
> of living in a sensory world into the materials
> for a play universe."[9]

It is not our weakness but our resilience and strength
that playfulness celebrates. There is always a heroic
element in playfulness.

A doll wakes and careers around the now empty room in its
pram.A sailor suit dances to and fro, until branches sprout
from walls and furniture, obscuring the suit and photographic
portrait on the wall.The branches blossom, rosy apples drop
and burst open, their insides maggot-ridden. The suit mounts
a rocking horse, which prances into the wardrobe. A wall of
children's building blocks fills the screen and arranges
itself into scenes; a landscape then a maze, through which
a line wanders to a dead end. A black cat scatters the
blocks. A stream of small dolls tears its way out of a
larger straw doll; they are then redressed, dismembered and
ground up by the mechanisms of a doll's house and a coffee
grinder. The bits are cooked before a tea-party of larger
dolls, innocently eating the fried and boiled parts. Squads
of soldiers,on horse and foot, march out of the sleeve of
an empty suit. A porcelain baby materializes in a cradle and
flattens the soldiers. A hat slides from the table to reveal

a small carved figure in bone on the top of a penknife, which
pirouettes around the table to lively music. When it finally
falls the blade snaps shut and blood oozes from the figure.
The pages of a schoolbook escape from their satchel and
become paper planes, boats and horses. The photgraphic
portrait of a man sticks out a real tongue, and begins to
exude dominoes backed with pictires of a girl's head. A
squadron of paper planes flies out into a courtyard. For the
last time the blocks and maze appear, the wandering line
sucessfully traverses the maze and wanders up the wall to
deface the portrait. The wardrobe opens; the cat struggles,
trapped in a bird-cage, and the child's suit lies crumpled.
Above it, an adult's black suit hangs on the rail.[10]

Much animated film has the cold articulation of malignancy
and evil, commonly associated with the horrific fantasies
of children's stories and games. This 'previous existance'
effect, this 'once upon a time' of an essential childhood
can be considered one of the (largely unconscious) aspects
of all fiction work. What distinguishes fiction film is not
the absense of any specific work of the signifier, but its
presense in the 'mode of denegation'. It may be considered
that this type of presense is one of the strongest there is.
Although films are photographic at base, they are products
of artifice imposed on their materials. The heart of the
film image is not in its documentary quality but rather in
its suggestfulness.

Our habit of seeing the world as a picture, that is with
built-in grids that provide meaning, functions only as long
as our intentionality is active- as long as there is purpose
in seeing the world that way.

" Pictures do not smile back at us when we smile;
in art there is no positive re-enforcement, no
sense that the work responds to our responses.
The act of looking must itself provide enough
challenge (if only the challenge of seeing reality
in the image),"[11]

Looking is an active enterprize, something that fully engages
the mind; the more the mind works on an image (literally
playing with it) the more it comes alive. Animated film
could be seen as the physical manifestation of such a process.

" There is a second, opposing element to mimicry
and mimesis; celebration. The business of dealing
with the world of cultural relativism, role-playing
'deceits' and perception is a remarkable thing in
itself."[12]

Children learning to talk seem to enjoy playing with language
patterns, until they understand that language is consequential.
From then on it becomes traumatic. It has been suggested that
the film-viewer can 'learn' cultural languages inconsequentially;
the act of learning is all pleasure, a playful encounter
with the new. This is not strictly considered escapism; rather
it is a return to a naive state, when the world was not so

dangerous and learning was an enjoyable thing.

Freedom of choice, not being constrained by other people
or by circumstances is considered a hallmark of play. Play
must therefore be a constructive and essential part of our
learning process. Through the principles of play we can
perhaps learn of new possibilities. This is important in
relation to finding new methods of articulating and changing
our situations, especially, for example in the case of
women, attempting to construct some kind of language from
which they are not, by definition, excluded.

> " All artistic discoveries are discoveries
> not of likenesses, but of equivalences, which
> enable us to see reality in terms of an image
> and an image in terms of reality; and this
> equivalence never rests on the likeness of
> elements so much as on the identity of responses
> 14
> to certain relationships."

1

Julian Petley, Monthly Film Bulletin,vol.53 no.629, p.188.

2

Micheal O'Pray,"IN the Capital of Magic", Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.53 no.630, p.218.

3

Ibid.

4

Ibid.

5

Charles Eidsvik, Cineliteracy: Film among the Arts, p.41.

6

Ibid.

7

"He has adopted the spirit of that illogical law...in his world all is flux and perpetual motion; destruction frequent and violent as it is, is often a means rather of creation and transformation."- Simon Field, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.53 no.630, p.222.

8

Charles Eidsvik, Cineliteracy:Film among the Arts, p.73.

9

Ibid., p.38

10

Jabberwocky , made by Svankmajer in 1971."In this theatre of the Absurd, where nothing is alive but everything moves, the only heart that beats is that of the black cat, spirit of mischief- it is the cat who is finally caged, image of the fettered imagination..."- Simon Field, Monthly Film Bulletin , vol. 53 no.630, p.222.

11

Charles Eidsvik, Cineliteracy: Film Among the Arts, p.41.

12

Ibid, p.37.

13

Ibid.

14

Gombrich, as referred to by C. Eidsvik, _Cineliteracy:
Film Among The Arts_, p.41.

" The cinema constitutes a conscious hall-
ucination, and utilizes the fusion of dream
and consciousness that the surrealists would
like to see realized. It is time cineastes saw
what they may gain in opening up their art to
the unexplored region of the dream...they
should lose no time in inbuing their product-
ions with the essential characteristics of the
dream- the visual, the illogical, the pervasive." [1]

David Lynch came to film through animation. In Eraserhead
there is a mixing of both animation techniques and 'real-time'
film work. The film has been described as being about a
lonely obsessive in a hellish industrial slum, who finds
himself stuck as the single parent of a grotesque baby, having
nightmares about worms and umbilical cords and fantasies of
a fat-cheeked woman in the radiator. [2]

The character Henry lives in a squalid apartment block amid
an industrial jungle of factories and wasteland. The opening
shots of the film show Henry's head on its side rising and
falling on the screen, and superimposed on top of an image(fig.17)
of what might be a planet. We are shown a mysterious character
throwing switches and some kind of foetus is ejected (also
superimposed onto Henry's head) and falls through the sky
into a puddle, where Henry passes by on his way home. His

neighbour tells him he has been invited to dinner with his
girlfriend at her parents' place. After dinner, a bizarre
meal in which chickens continue to kick and spout blood (fig.18)
even after roasting, and which is interupted by unexplained
fits of vomiting by the mother, Henry is told that he has
fathered a premature 'inhuman' baby. Mary moves in with
Henry. The grotesque animated baby cries incessantly. Mary
cannot take any more and abandons the baby, which is sudd-
enly taken chronically ill. Tending it, Henry fantasizes
about the strange spectacle of a woman dancing on a stage (fig.19)
with deformed cheeks, in the radiator. Next to the bed
a strange organic growth appears to be spreading. Henry
becomes distracted by the attentions of the woman across
the hall who is portrayed as some kind of fiendish sexual
figure, in whom Henry becomes interested. Eventually, in
what appears to be his own fantasy, Henry is decapitated (fig.20)
by a baby growing inside him. His head falls through space
and is picked up in a street and taken to a workshop,
where it is processed into pencil erasers. Back in his
room, Henry cuts away the bandages from the screaming baby(fig.22)
and then horrified, he stabs it. The baby's neck extends,
the head threatening Henry. Suddenly Henry seems to be
consumed by an enormous round object that might be a planet
(similar to the opening of the film). He is united with
the woman from his radiator fantasy in a blinding white
light.

It is within the puzzle of whether Henry has been dreamed

up or is the dreamer of the film, that Eraserhead exists.
The sense of nightmare is evoked by the use of stark black
and white photography, and also by the soundtrack, which
ranges from droning, hissing and clanking, to the sound
of tinny organ music and squelching noises, to the howling
of the mutant baby etc. The film can be said to work simul-
taneously in objective and subjective registers. Eraserhead
can be considered a social comedy of particularly acute
maladjustment, a cruel comedy of the self-perceived outsider
who imagines his grotesqueness through the eyes of others.
(At one point, Henry, trying to catch the attention of the
beautiful woman across the hall, suprises her with another
man and embarrasedly sees himself through their eyes; with
the head of his grotesque baby on his shoulders.) It has
been proposed that the Eraserhead scenario is about lonliness,
fear, a longing for security, and a desparate need to escape
from a grim life which traps the central character. This
might explain the film's atmosphere of dread, and account
for it in terms of some theme or narrative momentum, but
there is no real evidence that the hero has any interest in
going anywhere. It might otherwise be considered as a
rendering on film of the methods of Kafka's dream-narratives;
Joseph K's guilt, his fear of being called into account
for his life, generates his arrest... Henry's dread, his
fear of possessing his life, generates the fantasy of creation
gone wrong, of life biologically and industrially on the skids.[3]

It has been suggested that what accounts for all Lynch's
cinema is a certain irreducible innocence; imagining every
horror in order to remain untouched by it.[4] He refuses to
discuss the ideas behind his films, or to rationalize and
intellectualize the ideas/images that come into his mind.
This doesn't invalidate comparisons though, since however
derived, his images can sound odd resonances; the stairway
to the attic room in his animation The Grandmother where the
young hero is gestating his grandparent, becomes as much
of a Freudian symbol (if we chose to see it that way) as it
is in German expressionist films. If Lynch's images do bear
resemblances, they also resist being so narrowly streamed.
Henry shuffling through the industrial litter of Eraserhead
recalls the worker drones of Metropolis[5]; Eraserhead may be
seen in terms of a kind of 'Langian expressionism', or
equally in terms of a 'Griffithian pathos' (a 'vignette'
shot of Mary framed by the curtains of the window in her
parents' tumbledown dwelling, as she waits for Henry to
come to dinner); all cinema or no cinema may be involved
here.

Lynch conjures up a generalized genre mood. His references
tend to be less 'touchstones of nostalgia', but something
more like found objects, part of the magpie tradition of
'bricollage' which is found particularly in animation.
        "Lynch is a collector fascinated by textures
        which themselves can suggest a movie mood."[6]
His use of objects and textures is involved in the idea

of the layering of meaning.

> " I like the idea that everything has a surface
>
> which hides much more underneath."[7]

Without discussing references to specific images, Lynch has
said that the one biggest influence on Eraserhead was
Philidelphia;(where he lived for a time when first married)
the presence of violence and fear there. The mixing of
animation and real-time techniques, the attention to object
and texture,may be considered a method of translating his
experience/thoughts onto film.

> " There are certain things which stand out when
>
> you are going down a street, out of the ordinary
>
> things which just stick in your mind. That
>
> doesn't happen all the time, but when it does,
>
> it brings so much power that you can't forget it."[8]

Anyone approaching Eraserhead purely for narrative is liable
to regard the film as extremely obscure. It is not stylist-
ically similar to early surrealist cinema, but can perhaps
be seen as related to a broader tradition of non-realist art.

> " ...from gothic and fantastique paintings through
>
> the tortured canvasses of Francis Bacon to the late
>
> seventies graphic style of punk..."[9]

But Eraserhead defies these attempts at classification or
description; its visual surfaces and nightmarish thematic
threads are quite unique. Why certain events happen is as
much of a mystery to the protagonist Henry as it is to the
viewer. Eraserhead presents us with a representation of life

as psychologically confusing, uncertain and fragmented.
Lynch is not showing us a world of 'fantasy' as being
removed and unrelated to everyday living, but is arguably
showing us a sense of 'horror' which is everyday life. Where
fantasy takes over from reality becomes a matter of personal
interpretation. The mixing of melodrama and horror disrupts
the traditional representation of what constitutes reality.
Fantasy/fear is seen to be inextricable from so-called
'reality'. A comparison might be drawn between Eraserhead
and work such as The Trial/Metamorphosis [10], whose heros die
or are tranfigured in the opening sentances, and what follows
is without narrative momentum; simply an explication on that
state of non-being. [11]

There would seem to be a delicate balance in Eraserhead
between a kind of hysterical black humour and an extreme
earnestness. [12] (This balance of menace and humour is part of
much animation work, such as that by Jan Svankmajer/ The
Brothers Quay etc.) What is the nature of such black humour ?
How much does the nature and functioning of this humour
have to do animation, or the desire to animate ? Has it to
do with (as Richard Combs says of Eraserhead) imagining/
realizing one's worst fears so as to remain untouched by
them ? Is it an outlet for our need to imagine, or is our
imagining a result of our need to overcome fear ? What might
be the function/importance of 'humour' ?

In his writings on jokes, Freud suggests that jokes are
favoured to make critisism possible against people who
claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents a
rebellion from that authority, a liberation from its pressure.
He also suggests that humour can be regarded as one of most
extreme of defensive processes.[13]   It can find a means of
withdrawing energy from the release of unpleasure that is
already in preparation, and of transforming it, by discharge,
into pleasure. During the period when a child is learning
vocabularly etc, it can give him/her pleasure to 'experiment
with it in play'. Little by little this enjoyment is for-
bidden, until only significant combinations are permitted.
Whatever the motive for this kind of playing, Freud suggests
that in later developement the child gives it up with the
consciousness that it is 'non-sensical', and that s/he finds
enjoyment in the attraction of what is forbidden by reason.
He says that games are used in order to withdraw from the
pressure of critical reason. The potency of the restrictions
which establish themselves in the course of a child's
education in logical thinking and in distinguishing between
what is 'true' and 'false' in reality, results in the rebellion
agginst the compulsion of logic being 'deep-going' and
'long-lasting'.[14]

Might this suggest that the nature of black humour to be
found in the workings of certain film and animation has
something to do with rebellion against the domination of

logic and reason with which we have been brought up ?

Lying in a white bed surrounded by darkness, a girl hears
chanting "A B C". A male voice sings the praises of learning
the alphabet, while letters are seen to florish in sun-
light. As if stimulated by this concept, an indeterminate
form is born; as soon as its features are established, a
nearby plant sprinkles letters over it. The form collapses
in a red mess, which scatters dots over the girl and her
bed. She reaches for each of the letters of the alphabet
as they materialize around her, and a female voice sings
that she has learned her ABC. She is briefly tethered in
a cocoon of tendrils, then writhing painfully, she vomits
blood across the sheets.

The Alphabet is one of Lynch's two viewable works of
animation (the other being The Grandmother). They both
combine drawn animation with live actors, often treated
through make up or stop-motion techniques as if they were
players in a puppet film. In mood and subject they have been
said to echo the work of East European animators such as
Lenica and Borrowczyk, 'gleefully reversing the laws of
creation or combining human, animal and machine worlds in
malevolent alliance.'[15] But the sphere of Lynch's films
is considered less abstract than those models, more 'home
movie' like, with outrageous melodrama, psychodrama and
variations on the trials of family life.It has been suggested

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that had Lynch continued in animation he might now be prod-
ucing full scale puppet films (such as those by the Brothers
Quay), although in his recent film work characters are
still treated as though they were pixillated versions
of people;

> "...creatures neither human nor inhuman,
> whose life force follows its own skewed
> logic."[16]

FOOTNOTES

1

2
Tony Raynes,"Film Independants", Time Out, April 1977, p.51

3
Richard Combs, "Crude Thoughts and Fierce Forces", Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.54 no.639, p.51.

4
Ibid.

5
Ibid.

6
Ibid.

7
David Lynch, from an interview that was done in collaboration with The Media Show for Channel Four, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.54 no.639, (back page).

8
Ibid.

9
Richard Combs, Monthly Film Bulletin,vol. 54 no.639, p.102.

10
The Trial and Metamorphosis, by Franz Kafka (1883-1924).

11
Richard Combs , Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.54 no.639, p.102.

12
Ibid.

13
Freud, Jokes and Their Relationship to the Unconscious, p.299
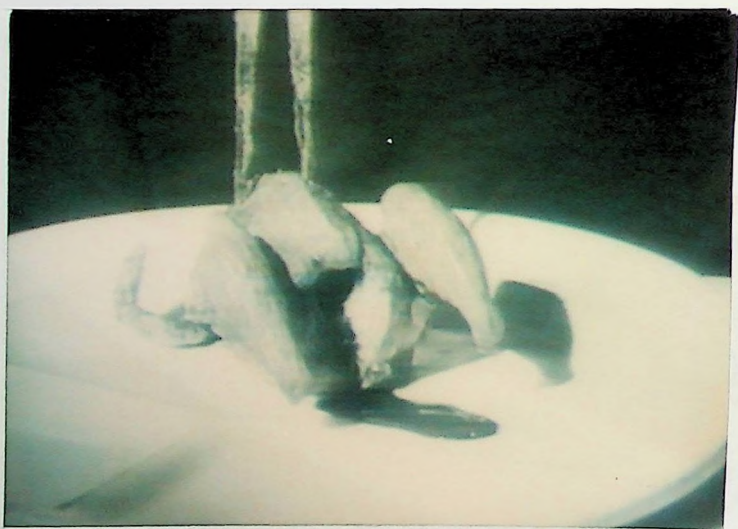
14
Ibid, p.175.

15
Richard Combs, Monthly Film Bulletin, vol.54 no.639, p.102. Much of this type of work can be seen in terms of a direct literal representation of something which is essnetially a metaphor.
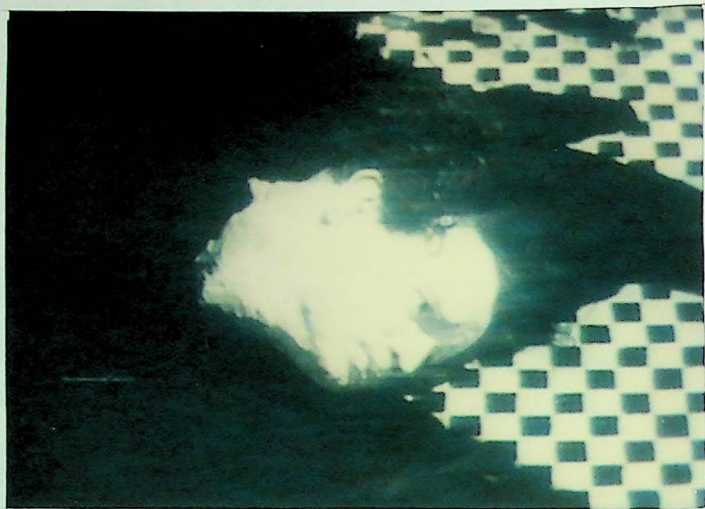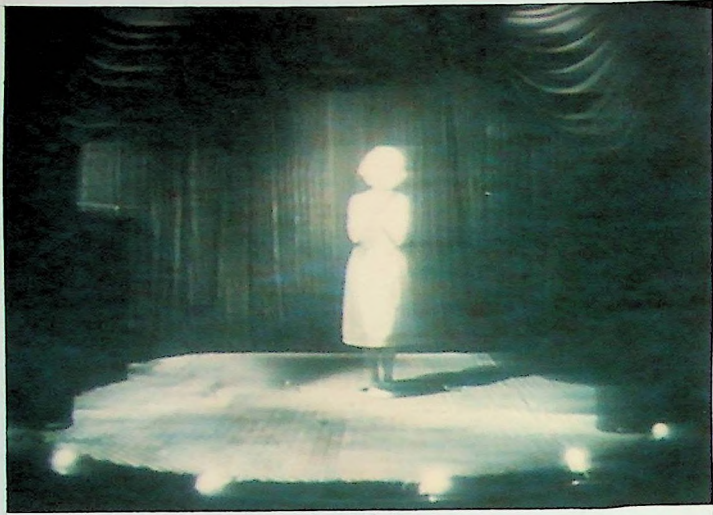
16
Ibid.

(Fig. 17)

(Fig.18)

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(Fig. 21)

(Fig. 22)

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(Fig. 19)

(Fig. 20)

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CONCLUSION

The question remains of whether we should attempt to
better understand the forms through which images are
produced. Is it important to distinguish between 'reality'
and its representation, or is the image/representation
all we need to talk about ? What we see in an image or
series of images depends on our anticipation about what
is important in that image. Anticipation and discrimination
are processes involving time. Perception does not simply
involve 'learning to see', it involves learning to
discriminate. Instead of talking about seeing and knowing,
we might do better to talk of seeing and noticing. We
notice only when we look for something, or when our attent-
ion is aroused by some disequilibrium; a difference
between our expectation and the incoming message. Is it
important to disrupt our expectations?

The cinema uses what we know and what we remember, as
well as our perceptual and imaginative abilities to envision
what we have never seen; this is perhaps its greatest
potential. Cinema depends on artists and audiences being
able to ask 'what if' ? The questions that cinema can ask
are limited only by the literalness and openness of film-
makers and film-going audiences. The dialectic between
our limited lives and the freedom of imagination can be
considered the source of the cinema. There are no absolutes

about what a film can or should be; the cinema is more flexible than that.

Fantasizing as such, is a crucial part of psychic life; a process required for human sexuality and subjectivity to be set in place and articulated, rather than a process which is either good or bad, or of which we can have too much or too little. How fantasy appropriates and incorporates social meaning, and forms the historically specific subjectivities available- this aspect of fantasy should perhaps be opened to political analysis and negotiation.

If areas of fantasy/play/humour/the unconscious etc. are seen to be in some way valuable in terms of understanding how our mental activities operate, can film be seen as a medium through which these thought processes can be articulated. Can the area of animated film work, in its capacity for metamorphosis and contradiction, contribute something to a negation of 'normality', and the refusal of strict static definition ? An analysis of the workings of classical cinema demanded that feminists made films which, if they did not invent a whole new film language, at least interrogated and refused the old conventions. This creates a problem of aticulation- is a new language possible? How would it relate to visual imagery; does the new only grow out of the work of confrontation that is done vis-a-vis traditional forms of expression and communication ? In relation to constructing/

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appropriating some kind of language through which to attempt
a negation/subvertion of the way in which society structures
us into positions, can the foregrounding of areas of dream/
play/the unconscious etc. be used as one method by which
to undermine the order of reason/domination of logic within
our society, or to perhaps identify points of leverage within it
for our own intervention?

Amos Vogal, in Film as a Subversive Art, claimed that an
honest cinema is a subversive cinema; a cinema that changes
ones mind as well as ones eyes.

> "...reality is dangerous, fantasy is dangerous.
> Art changes the imagination, and the person who
> imagines is dangerous indeed. As dangerous even
> as the person who thinks, though not as dangerous
> as the one who both thinks and imagines."[1]

FOOTNOTES

1

Charles Eidsvik, _Cineliteracy:Film among the Arts,_ p.278.

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