

**Animating the Unconscious**  
Desire, Sexuality and Animation

edited by Jayne Pilling



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## Introduction *by Jayne Pilling*

This book springs from a desire both to explore animation's unique ability to portray aspects of human experience and relationships that affect us all – desire and sexuality – in relation to a specific set of films that are significant in this respect, and to prompt further reflection on what this might tell us about the specificities of the medium of animation itself. As this is a rather large field of enquiry, it seems useful to first explain the book's genesis, and indicate its scope and focus.

Thinking around this topic was prompted, in part, from working on an international animation symposium, entitled 'Textures of Reality'<sup>1</sup> which set out to explore a range of inter-connected issues, as outlined in its programme introduction:

Say 'texture' and 'animation' to many people and they'll probably assume you mean developments in new technologies, such as 'texture mapping'. But, as animation filmmaker Joan Ashworth asks: 'What is texture? What does it make us feel or communicate in a film? Mind and senses need to be stimulated to be able to feel a feeling as well as see it!' This event offers an exploration of aspects of the unique contribution that animation can make to film. The textures of animated fantasy, conveying unconscious feelings, desires and sexuality. The texture of memory, as explored in Norstein's *Tale of Tales*, or the textural materiality of alternative universes, as in the films of the Brothers Quay. The texture of empathy, which animation can so mysteriously make us feel. The textures of bodily experience, from raw visceral sensation to highly mediated analysis. Textures of reality, from 'pure' drawn animation to fascinating hybrids of live-action and animation. Animation can make a unique contribution to the exploration and expression of states of mind, unconscious impulses, sexuality and sensory



experience. Unrestricted by the dictates of photographic realism and traditional narrative, animation can make such experience palpable via visual imagination, metaphor, metamorphosis and highly creative use of sound.<sup>2</sup>

Some of these issues, particularly those around desire and sexuality, in turn arose from reflecting upon a number of developments in animation over the past twenty five years or so, and a felt need to revisit observations made much earlier, specifically about animation made by women filmmakers:

The animated short film in particular can offer, quite literally, a blank page on which to draw forth an imaginative vision, and can also do so without words. Transcending the boundaries of language can also give voice to that which is hard to articulate, because so bound up with unconscious feelings, e.g. to desire and fantasy. Sex – as in sexuality, as well as in stereotyping – is also approached with an audacity, and authenticity, rarely found in animation made by men. (Pilling 1992: 6)

Curating film programmes about sexuality and desire for a women's animation festival, and a consequent frustration at being unable to include a number of important films made by men in this regard, prompted thoughts about how much has changed in animation since that paragraph was written. Although it seems clear that it was primarily women animation directors who opened up new terrain in terms of the subject matter animation could explore, sometimes from a specifically feminist or gender perspective, and often unafraid to explore personal experience, the emergence of a number of male filmmakers whose work deals with issues around desire and sexuality, and particularly in relation to masculinity, has shown that what had previously been considered very much the preserve of women filmmakers is now no longer necessarily so. And to that extent, it might be considered that animation can be said to have finally come of age.

This book does not essay any over-arching theoretical paradigm, nor an historical overview, of representations of desire and sexuality in animation generally, which is a much wider topic, but rather seeks to explore, in a variety of ways, why and how animation is so appropriate a medium for such subject matter, and how such films may work with viewers.

The focus is on short films, particularly those that are variously termed independent/personal/art/auteur animation. (Each of these terms is problematic,<sup>3</sup> but for the sake of brevity I will opt here for the use of 'auteur' or 'art' animation<sup>4</sup>). This is because such films can be much more adventurous, original and provocative in their approach, as they are made outside mainstream commercial production,<sup>5</sup> and because they are made for adult

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audiences. In relation to animation, the comparison between prose – or the novel – and poetry has often been made to point out how the short form animation film can allow for ellipsis, condensation, multiple associations and so on;<sup>6</sup> the format also allows for narratives that are neither linear nor rational – just as desire is rarely rational in how it plays out in human relationships – but which can communicate to powerful effect. It is surprising just how much of the complexities of human experience a short animation film can convey in the space of five, ten or fifteen minutes. Such length also makes such films very useful for discussion of these and related issues in the classroom.

The introduction to *A Reader in Animation Studies* (Pilling 1997: iv–xviii) pointed to a lack of widely-shared viewing experience around much auteur animation and the relative inaccessibility of many films, outside of very specialist circles, as an impediment to the development of analytical and theoretical work about it. It also argued for more sustained textual analysis of individual films as part of this project. Since then, distribution problems have all but disappeared, with DVD making both historically important and contemporary short films widely available, as well as the fact that so many animated shorts now find their way (legally or not), onto the Internet.<sup>7</sup> Since then, the field of animation studies has expanded enormously: both in terms of the number and scope of scholarly and more accessibly written publications available, and the number of degree courses, either purely academic or as a critical studies component in practice-based study, where students are required to engage with critical thinking about animation. Paul Wells, as one of the most prolific and influential of such scholars, has played a key role in developing theoretical and analytical approaches to animation, in both its multiple manifestations in the commercial mainstream *and* in the auteur short film, as has Maureen Furniss.<sup>8</sup> And whilst the problematics of inter-disciplinarity may continue to perpetuate a Babel-like configuration of discourses, it is an energising and exciting Babel's Tower to explore.

It therefore seems legitimate and, I hope, useful to explore in some detail a collection of key animation films that relate, both directly and more tangentially, to the subject of this book. Here, it is worth stressing that desire is taken not as necessarily or only ever sexual in meaning, but as it speaks to a more general human desire for connection, for relationship, for the push and pull of the urge to feel at one with another, yet retain a sense of identity. From humour to provocation, realism to surrealism, the intimate confessional to cutting-edge social comment, via fable, myth and metaphor, as well as acute and comic observation of human behaviour, the films discussed offer a range of varying perspectives on desire and sexuality in human relationships.

It is a commonplace to observe that animation can take far greater liberties than live-action, in form and subject matter, via its capacity to express



the unfettered imagination. Indeed, Paul Wells has commented that 'animation has become a vehicle by which inarticulable emotions and experiences may be expressed' (1998: 184). It is worth considering, in the present context, albeit briefly and tentatively, some aspects of why and how this 'has become' the case.

A number of factors seem to have contributed to this development: a general shift in auteur animation culture that has seen a move from the universal to the more particular; the influence of feminism; the emergence of a specific form of animated documentary film; and much more frequent use of the human, rather than 'cartoony' or anthropomorphic, voice, i.e. one that confers a sense of a real person speaking of their own experience. With all due caution as to the dangers of making large generalisations (since more detailed analysis would require another book altogether) these developments are briefly outlined below.

First, there seems to have been an observable shift away from a long-standing and hitherto dominant tradition of 'universality' in the subject matter of short art animations to a focus on depictions of more individualised, specific and subjective experiences. However individual by virtue of a recognisable authorial signature (in visual style, thematic preoccupation or approach), however personal in terms of inspiration, and in some cases to whatever extent exhibiting a distinctive 'national' imprint, for a long time a great many of what are considered classics of art or auteur animation seemed predicated on a belief that animation was a universal language, able to convey universal truths; tall tales, parables and allegories, or observations of human behaviour often cast as such that used stories to point up more-general conclusions. More recent approaches have begun to embrace the complexities and contradictions of the individual's lived experience. Or perhaps, to be more accurate, since such a 'universal' model continues to flourish – evidence of the vitality and appeal of that tradition – this shift might be attributed to the development of a generally much broader conception of what animation films can deal with, and the forms in which they might do so.

Historical context is important here, especially in regard to the experience of World War II and its effects on short film animation in the post-war era. In part because the period saw a relatively widespread development, primarily in Canada, Western Europe and the Eastern-bloc Communist countries,<sup>9</sup> of institutions that enabled the production of animation as an art form for adult audiences (in addition to cartoons made for children),<sup>10</sup> in part, and not unrelated to that production context, because animation was seen as an accessible and effective conduit for 'messages'.<sup>11</sup> This seemed all the more imperative after the horrors of World War II, and the continuing anxieties of the Cold War.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the reasons for state support for such forms of

animation, and in particular country, and specific animation produced.

A proliferation of the folly and futility of modern and bureaucratic life had from observation many animated shorts. In discussion of gender and function, it is the "everyman", in which become the symbolic

For a long time to have no dialogue in practical terms, facilities. Indeed, the development of animation's claims to universal address, one continues to this day in animation written dialogue in animation cites as having such

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In this respect comment on the first wave of women in the 1970s. 'The notion that *The Marriage of Figaro* than those in opera film represented 'animation' (cited



animation, and in particular the way it operated, has differed from country to country, and specific national contexts will impact upon the nature of films produced.

A proliferation of films about man's inhumanity to man, man's stupidity, the folly and futility of war, the grand existential dilemma, the alienations of modern and bureaucratic society, and the apparently endless comedy to be had from observations of the battle between the sexes seem characteristic of many animated shorts produced from that time. As Wells has observed, in a discussion of gender representation, 'if masculinity is not coded through role and function, it is often played out through the universalising concept of "everyman", in which male figures, or figures which are assumed to be male, become the symbolic embodiment of humankind' (1998: 196).

For a long time it was also more usual than not for such animated shorts to have no dialogue: again, for reasons of universality of address (and, in practical terms, facilitating exhibition at international festivals, and foreign sales). Indeed, the debate as to whether the use of voice somehow undermines animation's claims to being a distinctively different cinematic form, of universal address, one that is at its purest without the need for the spoken word, continues to this day.<sup>13</sup> Gianalberto Bendazzi, in an essay on the human voice in animation written in 1995, was still able to comment that voice-over or dialogue in animated auteur shorts was relatively unusual, and the films he cites as having such are clearly indicated as exceptions (1995: 309).

The influence of feminism, and a consequential opening up of opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s for women to emerge as animation filmmakers in their own right, and in increasing number, also had its impact on the subject matter of, and approach to, auteur animation. As this development has been discussed in detail elsewhere (see Pilling 1992: 5-7; Wells 1998:184-99), suffice it to reiterate here that in addition to a desire on the part of (some) women animators to challenge a male-dominated tradition of stereotypical gender representation, the films produced by women went far beyond what might be seen as merely 'women's issues', opening up a space for more personal stories and often more innovative formal approaches.

In this respect it is worth noting animation historian Richard Taylor's comment on the film *The Black Dog* (1987) by Alison de Vere, one of the first wave of women animators to break through to international prominence in the 1970s. *'The Black Dog* represents the same sort of advance in animation that *The Marriage of Figaro* was in opera... Just as the characters in *The Marriage of Figaro* were portrayed as more rounded, more subtle, more real than those in operas up to that time', so, he feels, at the time it was made this film represented 'the most complete rendering of a human being ever seen in animation' (cited in Kitson 2009: 86).



Whilst some might challenge this assertion, it points to the impact the film made through the way it drew upon the filmmaker's own experiences and dreams to combine them with mythological source material, in what was felt to be a very new approach.

The development of a particular form of animated documentary, based on recorded interviews with real people, may also have played a role in this shift to depictions of individual, specific experience. This type of film is now so relatively familiar it may be difficult to imagine how groundbreaking works such as Aardman Studio's *Animated Conversations* (1978), or more formally experimental work such as Marjut Rimmenin's *Some Protection* (1987) and Tim Webb's *A is for Autism* (1992), appeared at the time they were first seen. The animated documentary format, and audiences for it, have since spread worldwide; recent high-profile examples being Chris Landreth's Academy Award-winning short *Ryan* (2004) and the Israeli feature film, Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), with the latter achieving international cinema release. However different all these films might be from one another – ranging from social realism to explorations of social issues, through psychological investigations to quirky and comedic interpretation – the format offers viewers opportunities to feel something of the lived experience of the films' protagonists in ways that differ significantly from those of live-action.<sup>14</sup> Critical work on this development has enabled a much wider platform for new thinking to emerge around the specificity of animation's contribution to the documentary format,<sup>15</sup> and in particular as to how it can depict subjective experience.

Most animated documentary is based on recordings of real people, the human voice, as opposed to voice-actors making 'cartoony' voices. As Michel Chion (1994) has observed, we process voice more quickly than we do images, and, in terms of films that employ complex formal strategies to explore equally complex aspects of experience, hearing the human voice offers viewers a handle with which to process imagery that may not be uniform or which may combine different techniques, that is, images we need time to make sense of. An unfolding narrative may employ non-linear sequences of images but the linearity of a voice-over can provide an anchor for the viewer.<sup>16</sup> Equally, the interplay between a human voice recounting recognisably human experiences and an animated *mise-en-scène* allows for the filmmaker's interpretative strategies.

To return to issues around desire and sexuality, more generally, it is clear that in the wider culture, at least in much of the Western hemisphere, the changing climate in both sexual politics and sexual mores has put discussion of such matters firmly in the public domain. Whether in the fine arts, or in such barometers of contemporary pop culture as TV reality and chat shows and YouTube, the confessional culture seems to have become all pervasive.<sup>17</sup>

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What once may have seemed purely private and personal matters, hardly to be discussed outside the psychotherapeutic space or the academic arena, are now out there in the public domain.

How can animation really represent and make the viewer *feel* the complexities of human experience, in anything but a necessarily abstracted, because stylised, way? Bendazzi has pointed out that much animation is a form of pantomime (1995: 309). The broad gesture, exaggeration, caricature, abstraction remain the predominant stock in trade of animated depictions of the human figure. The astonishing variety of forms this can take is indeed often part of its appeal to the viewer. It is also often remarked that the one thing that animation cannot do, in comparison to live-action, is convey the extraordinary subtlety of facial expression (as testified by the endless discussion on the 'uncanny valley' effect in CGI and mo-cap animation, and the 'synthespian' debates).

Marcel Jean suggests the importance of physical presence in live-action films 'as a factor in audience identification with a film's protagonists'. He continues:

More often than not, it is the actor's body that the camera films ... I'd even go so far as to say that the body is the main vehicle of emotion. I'm thinking here of the body as an object of sexual desire ... from Marilyn Monroe to Sharon Stone ... but also of the body as emblematic of illness, Tom Hanks as the AIDS sufferer in *Philadelphia*, or of failure, Robert de Niro as Jake la Motta in *Raging Bull*... (1995: 77; author's translation)

Jean refers to how the physical tension that results when we observe a protagonist in peril can make viewers grip the edge of their seats, react physically to the impact of violence, remarking that such intensely felt gestures

bear witness to a relationship to the film that goes beyond the emotional and intellectual to a more physical order ... The viewer's identification with characters that appear on screen, a crucial phenomenon in live-action cinema, happens very rarely in animation. It is as if this form of cinema lacks something with which to anchor the viewer's feelings. And that something is the body, the weight of the body, which acts precisely as an anchor, guaranteeing the stability of the means of emotional communication (1995: 80; author's translation).

He goes on to suggest this as a reason for animation often being considered, and undervalued, as merely a vehicle for amusement and harmless fantasy.<sup>18</sup>

The intent here is to explore a number of films that *do* affect and empathetically engage viewers in ways that live-action does not. To do so, this



volume offers a combination of approaches. A selection of filmmakers who have produced some of the most significant work in this area are explored in monographic essays, and some of their films are also discussed, along with those of other filmmakers, in a set of more thematic essays, to provide a range of intersecting perspectives. To expand on these critical perspectives, some of those filmmakers were also invited to reflect on their own and on others' practice, via interview and/or in written form.

While some may feel one should observe D. H. Lawrence's admonition to 'Never trust the teller. Trust the tale', it is nonetheless revealing and instructive to know more about individual filmmakers' working processes, including retrospective thoughts on their films. It is also interesting to see to what extent a filmmaker's view or focus might differ from that of a critic who is a non-practitioner: particularly in terms of engagement with the formal strategies of the films. Interviews with filmmakers have been edited to offer, as far as is possible, a more structured and legible account than a full transcript of what are long and sometimes discursive discussions. In most cases, the interviews emphasise process, intention and meaning, rather than technical aspects, since there are already many books that cover such issues far more comprehensively. The few exceptions regarding technique have been largely dictated by my experience of teaching such films, when questions have been asked where material is not so easily available.

In much conventional live-action narrative, and animated features, sound and music are used to underscore drama, emotion and sometimes comedy, to cue viewer response, but usually in respect of the action and dialogue. In many of the animated films discussed here (and arguably in most art animations) sound has a far more creative role to play. The usual distinctions made between diegetic and non-diegetic sound seem far less clear cut.<sup>19</sup> As Daniel Goldmark has observed, whilst recent developments in musicology and film studies have begun exploring sound in far more detail,

the application of film music terminology to cartoons, such dichotomies as source/underscore, diegetic/non-diegetic ... fail to take into account that music is far more integral to the construction of cartoons than of live-action films because the two forms are created in completely different ways. (2005: 4)

This speaks to the fact that the sound in animation is created from scratch (with the obvious exception of those films that use voice-over narration).<sup>20</sup> Sound can function as a narrative device in itself; hence the section on sound, music and voice, as it relates to the films under discussion.

The issues raised around bodily presence and audience response to a film's protagonists seem germane to these issues, and more generally to depictions

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of desire, and inform a number of the essays and interviews, in conjunction with detailed consideration of the role of voice and sound in viewer identification. Simon Pummell's film *The Secret Joy of Falling Angels* (1992) provides a useful focus for these, and other intersecting concerns. It is totally unlike a traditional cartoon, lacks a conventional narrative, and consequently presents difficulties of comprehension for some viewers, which may be clarified through discussion. At the same time, its self-conscious referencing of bodily representation in both Western art traditions and Disney cartoons opens up further perspectives on representations of the body in animation. The film's extraordinarily powerful soundtrack combines music with voice, the latter as both an instrument and an embodiment of its female character, to shape the emotional trajectory of a visual narrative that oscillates between figuration and abstraction. This is discussed and illustrated in detail, via an interview with its composer and a reproduction of the annotated 'film log' she kept during the process, providing a rare insight into a composer's thinking and developmental process.

Most art is produced through a combination, or negotiation, of unconscious impulses and conscious reflection, and filmmakers display differing degrees along this continuum of conscious design. In animation, much of the development process is more likely to be visual, hence the inclusion of such material. Extracts from notebooks and storyboards are one format. But in the case of a film such as *guy101* (2006), which has provoked many contradictory interpretations, and where storyboarding only began once the final script for voice-over was completed, an annotated draft, from around midway through the writing process, is included for comparison with the final version.

In paying close attention to the interaction of form and content, and exploring possible readings of films that are sometimes both formally and thematically dense and complex works, the aim is to provide both a 'way in' for the viewer, and a springboard for further reflection. Although it is more usual for a book about animation to be either purely critical/theoretical or much more practically oriented, i.e. for aspiring animators, I hope that this more kaleidoscopically explorative approach will prove useful.

### Notes on the films discussed

It seemed to make sense for this discussion to opt for a range of films that have made an impact on the international scene over the last twenty years or so, as testified by the fact that most have won multiple international awards; that the films should be both interesting in themselves yet seem to speak to one another; are easily available on DVD;<sup>21</sup> and demonstrate a diversity of thematic and aesthetic approaches, styles and techniques. It is hoped that the



reader/viewer will make comparisons with other films from their own viewing experience. Although each film stands on its own, viewed together, or in thematic groupings, their concerns intersect in ways that are briefly outlined below.

Fairy-tale, myth and fable have been perennial sources for literature and the visual arts, and animated cartoons are no exception, both for family audiences (from Disney's feature film adaptations to 3D spoofs of such, as in the on-going *Shrek* series, and for adults (e.g. the overt sexualisation of many Tex Avery cartoons that play on familiar fairy-tale narratives). They also prove fruitful critical terrain for gender studies.<sup>22</sup> Independent filmmaker Vera Neubauer – a pioneer of feminist filmmaking (notwithstanding her refusal of the attribution), has often drawn on fairy-tale but also on myth as in her *Wheel of Life* (1999). This film and Alison de Vere's *The Black Dog* both draw on Biblical stories, mythology and fable; one in more literally earthy mode, being made in the sand on the beach and playing on notions of the 'natural order', the other in more fabular style, yet both examine the social construction of femininity.<sup>23</sup> While de Vere's film concentrates on the individual journey of an 'everywoman', Neubauer squares up to patriarchal and authoritarian Judeo-Christian traditions, with specific reference to the Old Testament stories in Genesis.

Masculinity is explored by Andreas Hykade in his trilogy of films *We Lived in Grass* (1995), *Ring of Fire* (2000) and *The Runt* (2006); the first two in particular dramatise how pressures to conform to ideas of what it is to 'be a man' can impact on a youth's capacity for both sexual and emotional connection with the opposite sex. Both films are also resonant with religious imagery, a reminder of the Judeo-Christian tradition's associations of sex with sin. *Ring of Fire* also draws upon the mythology and iconography of the cowboy figure, another powerful construct of masculinity.

Desire is sometimes characterised by ambivalence and ambiguity, and such emotions are conveyed, in very different ways, in the films of Michèle Cournoyer. Her film *The Hat* (2000) is shocking, for some, in its exploration of these issues, rather than simple condemnation: as Chris Robinson has noted, it is 'not just a film about sexual abuse. It is a film about addiction, love, seduction and emotional manipulation' (2005: 91). Ambivalence also seems to characterise many of the relationships depicted in Igor Kovalyov's films, which are fraught with unspoken tensions between men and women. Although rooted in deeply personal memories, they also speak more generally of a sense of the essential unknowability of other people, and how this plays out against the desire for connection, partnership and family – a simultaneous attraction to, and repulsion for, the ensnarements of domesticity and intimacy. The men and women in his films seem destined to experience

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intense emotions whose power ultimately isolates them from one another. The prevalence of characters who continually watch one another, through doors and windows in domestic spaces that both contain and exclude, builds a sense of a constantly frustrated desire to see so as to understand. Family secrets, the hidden erotic undercurrents that are sensed by the child in Igor Kovalyov's *Milch* (2005), are explored to very different purpose in Marjut Rimmenin and Christine Roche's *The Stain* (1991); in one respect, more directly, from a clearly socio-political and feminist perspective, yet in formal terms, via a complex and looping narrative structure. (The film also provides an interesting contrast to Cournoyer's *The Hat* in terms of its exploration of incest: the one raw and from inside subjectivity, the other more coolly analytical amidst its family melodrama.)

Pummell's *The Secret Joy of Falling Angels* plays out the co-existence of coercion, compulsion, complicity and violence in its vivid depiction of the sexual act, although to ultimately more celebratory effect, whilst Cournoyer's *A Feather Tale* (1992), which has provoked both metaphorical and allegorical interpretations, is particularly interesting for its interrogation of the ambiguities of submission and seduction, and the way sexual game-play enacts power relationships between individuals. The latter is taken to further extremes of sexual 'edgeplay' and the eroticism of anonymous sexual encounters in Ian Gouldstone's *guy101*, in a story that is recounted through the virtual world of a gay internet chatroom.

The mediated 'confessional' format of *guy101* is in marked contrast to that of Ruth Lingford's *What She Wants* (1994), where the filmmaker unflinchingly puts herself in the picture in a rawly immediate depiction of a woman's frustrations in the face of the omnipresent sexual imagery of consumer culture. First-person voice-over features, in confessional mode, in both Alys Hawkins' *Crying and Wanking* (2002), about the consequences of sexual honesty, and Ruth Hayes' *Wanda* (1981), a diary account of a woman's developing jealousy of her cat's more active sex-life. Startlingly frank first-person narrative is also a feature of *Never Like the First Time!* (2006), based on recorded interviews with four individuals of differing ages about their loss of virginity.

Desire and sex are often experienced as problematic simply because of the implications of surrendering the self to another, loss of control and vulnerability (again also explored in *guy101*). Marie Paccou's *Un Jour* (1997) is a poignant and deceptively simple account of a relationship that uses bodily metaphor to explore such emotions. In Kojiro Shishido's wordless *Naked Youth* (2006), the admission of homosexual desire for another, the risk and excitement of the act, is conveyed purely through the gaze of its main character. The structure of the film reflects an obsessive reworking of emotionally charged moments, and its protagonist's growing awareness of the nature of



his desire, a tension that climaxes, literally, in the laying bare of the self.

Fear of female sexuality, and attempts to control it, are addressed in both Alys Hawkins' *Hysteria* (2001) and Craig Welch's *How Wings are Attached to the Backs of Angels* (1996). The former, via a very short and witty take on contradictions in the history of the medical establishment's attempt to understand women's bodies; the latter, via a complex narrative on which Tom Sorley comments 'the film re-examines the Icarus myth as a search not for freedom but for control. The film is an icy gothic sliver of masculinity in crisis. Unable to control the world beyond his doors, and confused by his own desires, the protagonist constructs his own prison' (1999: 48).

Humour is a traditional remedy for soul-searching and anxieties around sex. The 'battle of the sexes' is a subject that has informed a long tradition of animated short films, be they tired and misogynistic, didactic and feminist, or post-feminist (as in the films of Signe Baumane) or various points in between.

In this respect it is even-handedness that characterises the work of Michaela Pavlátová, an acute and extremely witty observer of human behaviour, whose films play on missed connections, and mutually frustrated romantic expectations between the sexes. The delusions engendered by seductive notions of the 'happy ever after' romance are wittily dissected in her film *Forever and Forever* (1998), whilst in *Repete* (1995) the characters' ultimate inability to free themselves from the ingrained patterns of behaviour in which they imprison themselves and their partners is driven by the furious energy of frustration. Disappointed desires and (literally) deflated expectations are explored with wry humour in Alison Snowden's *Second Class Mail* (1984), about a lonely middle-aged woman who sends away for a male blow-up doll: here the humour arises from traditional cartoon tropes of visual puns, incongruity and reversal of expectations. Almost as a commentary on the (very) short film format, its capacity for condensation and temporal ellipse, Monica Fosberg's *His Passionate Bride* (2004) both replicates and spoofs the depiction of desire as an emotional rollercoaster of excess, as in soap-opera, where lust for money, power and sex become inextricably linked.

Finally, although most of the films discussed hereafter are more focused on the dynamics of desire and sexuality in terms of how people relate to one another, animation's freedom to depict genitalia in ways neither live-action, including porn, could possibly achieve may result in films that are both humorous and fascinating in terms of different gender approaches. Does the gender of the filmmaker or the viewer make a difference? Is it in fact immediately clear whether the filmmaker is male or female? Reactions to the film may vary according to whether the film is seen by a mixed or same-sex audience. Do these questions matter? The baldly entitled *Penises* (2007) by Mario Addis, a series of anatomically probing mini-analyses of male sexuality,

could also be seen as a commentary on the male organ. Emily Mantell's *Komkommer* (1999) explores male fantasies, whose purpose is to show it is possible to show it and secondly, in the sense of not invited a number of viewers, both male and female. The soundtrack – a series of gasps, bounces and moans. Whilst most of the film conjures up expectations of the film conjures up tropes, plus a rigorous – an almost text-based images, and so on.

Since the developments in 'Animating Reality' new publications *Il Documenta* that this collection

Work on this and Digital Media and Suzie H. of Pennsylvania teachers in feedback on thank all the engagement Gulsen Yani

## Notes

- 1 This was only with the R



could also be said to be calculated to dispel all traces of penis envy, while Emily Mantell's *To Have and to Hold* (2003) offers a female perspective on the male organ that makes toyboys seem positively redundant. The film *Pink Komkommer* (1980) is an unsettlingly comic cartoon cornucopia of sexual fantasies, whose explicit depiction of sexual acts would simply be impossible to show in live-action, for two very obvious reasons: firstly, censorship, and secondly, because much of the sexual behaviours in it are fantastic in the sense of not being physically possible. Animator-director Marv Newland invited a number of his peers – internationally renowned animation filmmakers, both male and female – to create a visual interpretation of the exact same soundtrack – a sound ‘performance’ suggestive of sexual acts (moans, groans, gasps, bouncing, slurping, suction and accessories, such as whipcracks). Whilst most of the filmmakers opted to take this literally, some play against expectations of the sexually explicit. For a detailed examination of the way the film conjugates issues of transgression, gender and comedic animation tropes, plus a psychoanalytical reading, the reader is directed to Paul Wells’ rigorous – and entertaining – analysis (1998: 174–8). The film is also an almost text-book example of how the same sounds can be put to different images, and still ‘fit’, though to radically different effect.<sup>24</sup>

Since the initial preparations for this volume, there have been significant developments in the critical thinking on this area of animation, including the ‘Animating Realities’ conference held in Edinburgh in June 2011. In addition, new publications are being prepared, including Thomas Martinelli’s volume *Il Documentario animato*, scheduled for release in 2012. It is hoped, therefore, that this collection assists in the exploration of this critical subject.

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## Notes

- 1 This was organised by the present author, Joan Ashworth and Ruth Lingford in collaboration with the Royal College of Art, and held at the National Film Theatre, London on February 10–12



- 2004, and was accompanied by a series of film programmes.
- 2 National Film Theatre programme, February 2004.
  - 3 'Independent' is often used to signal a film made outside of the commercial mainstream, but such films often depend on institutional or public funding for at least part of their production costs; 'personal' may suggest a narrowness of focus, or subject matter that is not in fact the case.
  - 4 See Paul Wells' summary of definitions of auteurism (1998: 245–6).
  - 5 Although, as Ruth Lingford, has pointed out in a communication to the author, 'cheaper production techniques and more flexible distribution methods mean' that the world of feature films is now opening up to individual voices.
  - 6 See Wells' discussion of condensation, synecdoche, symbolism and metaphor (1998: 76–4).
  - 7 Even if this may pose problems in terms of aesthetic analysis due to poor image and sound quality.
  - 8 For examples see Wells 1998 and 2002, and Furniss 1998.
  - 9 This is not to deny movements in the USA, the UPA Studios being a case in point, for its innovative aesthetic and determination to speak to adult audiences, and the 'limited animation' style they developed was highly influential internationally, particularly on the studio that became known as the 'Zagreb school' in the former Yugoslavia (see Amidi 2006: 182–7) and has continued to inspire successive generations of animators around the world. It should also be noted that although this book specifically focuses on short films largely made outside the commercial mainstream, this is not because the latter is without importance and interest, generally or to the topic at hand, nor that there is any implied hierarchy of artistic talent involved. Both the history of animation, and the practice of contemporary animation, clearly demonstrates the fruitful interaction, reciprocal influences of art/auteur animation and the mainstream, and reflects the working realities of many animators in both domains.
  - 10 The emphasis here is on institutions; of course there had, been particularly in Europe, a great deal of art animation produced from the 1920s onward, as is well documented in most histories of animation, but these were often one-off films, dependent on grants, private money, small studios, whereas in what was then the USSR, and Eastern-bloc countries, it was state-funded studios that ensured continuity of production; in Canada, the National Film Board; on a lesser scale, in France, television, government funding and the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel; in the UK, the British Film Institute.
  - 11 The National Film Board was initially established in order to produce films that contributed to government policies such as propaganda for the war effort and forging a national identity in a nation full of immigrants.
  - 12 Although such 'support' was subject to censorship, it is still the case that in comparison to most other countries, this continuity of funding did enable a remarkable amount of freedom and innovation. The censorship problems encountered, for example by Yuri Norstein (see Kitson 2005) or Estonian filmmaker Priit Pärn (see Robinson 2006), did not finally prevent the films being made.
  - 13 See also comments by Priit Pärn (Pilling 2001: 115).
  - 14 For a dissenting view on this point, at least of the earlier Aardman series of *Animated Conversations*, see Jean 1995: 161–70.
  - 15 See, in particular Ward 2008.
  - 16 It is also sadly the case that the vogue for using recorded conversations may also result in films that are merely illustrated voicetracks, where voice is used to prop up or substitute for actual *mise-en-scène*.
  - 17 See the discussions on 'confessional culture' at <http://www.culturewars.org.uk/204-02/dec04>.

htm.

- 18 However, Jean doe making meaningful Hébert.
- 19 Similarly, traditional with many art and ends. For a highly influential
- 20 But even here, *Lived in Grass* (1998) effects film were
- 21 Specifically and *Unconscious* (2000)
- 22 See [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)
- 23 For more details see Law 1997 and 1998
- 24 See also Miche experiments in playing the sar

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- L. Kramer University



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- 18 However, Jean does then discuss the work of animation filmmakers he feels have succeeded in making meaningful representations of the human body, such as Norman McLaren and Pierre Hébert.
- 19 Similarly, traditional shot-by-shot analysis in live-action films becomes rather more problematic with many animation films, since it is often impossible to determine where 'a shot' starts and ends. For a more general consideration of the diegetic/non-diegetic use of sound, see the highly influential and provocative article, Stilwell 2007.
- 20 But even here, narration is not always recorded first; for example, Andreas Hykade's films *We Lived in Grass* (1995) and *Ring of Fire* (2000) where it was added after the picture and sound-effects film were completed.
- 21 Specifically and primarily, the three-volume collection *Desire Et Sexuality: Animating the Unconscious* (2007) available from [www.britishanimationawards.com](http://www.britishanimationawards.com).
- 22 See [www.answers.com/topic/feminism-and-fairy-tales](http://www.answers.com/topic/feminism-and-fairy-tales)
- 23 For more detailed discussion, particularly relating to the use of mythology in de Vere's film, see Law 1997 and Kitson 2009: 83–6.
- 24 See also Michel Chion's account and comments on filmmaker and composer Marizio Kagel's experiments in playing fifteen different soundtracks to the same sequence of images, then playing the same soundtrack to fifteen different film sequences (1985: 117).

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