

A Living Archeology of Animation
Description of the research - Jean-Marc Gauthier.
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The proposed research, “A Living Archeology of Animation”, focuses on technological innovation in animation from the origins of animation to present time.

Description

The goal of the study is to explore some important “milestones” in the history of animation. I think that the idea of a historical perspective of animation is invaluable at a time when animators and audiences experience a great diversification of media. To me the history of animation encompasses traditional animation, animation using computer graphics and interactive animation for the web and devices. For all of these stages, innovation started with early pioneers; the works of which are not often seen.

Study of a selection of animations

The first part of the research will be the study of a selection of animations by Emile Reynaud, Eadweard Muybridge, Etienne-Jules Marey, Emile Cohl, Winsor McCay, Walt Disney studios, Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, Oskar Fischinger, Alvy Ray Smith, David Evans, Ivan Sullivan, John Lasseter, Hayao Mayazaki, Phil Tippett, James Cameron, Wes Anderson, Satoshi Kon, Pi San, Peter Jackson and others.

Each animation will be studied inside its historical context and with a focus on the personality of the animator(s) in order to

- (1) measure the weight and importance of technological innovation in the animation
- (2) explore pre-existing stories developed in the animation
- (3) document and analyze the reception by the audience through time

Trans-disciplinary research and approaches will add another dimension to the project and address important ideas and concepts that are relevant throughout the history of animation. Some of the threads are:

- The invention of elements of the language of animation. I plan to outline the roles of early innovators, early adopters of innovations and the trail that is left in the present day production environment.
- The relationship between innovation, the story and the audience.

What is archeology of animation?

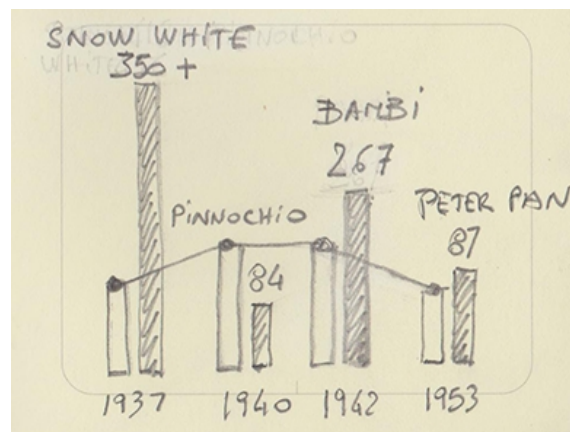
‘It’s not where you take things from – it’s where you take them to’.” Jean-Luc Godard

The second part of the research will focus on archeology of innovations that took place before a form of animation found its audience. The processes of acknowledgement by an audience repeat at different times during the history of animation. For example Emile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* is an acknowledgement by an audience of the experimentations of the early pioneers. The first success of Pixar was the consecration of research in computer graphics for animation. Something similar happened with animations created for the Web in *Flash* and will happen soon with interactive animations played on smart phones and tablets.

One question that comes to mind about the archeology of animation is why did it take so long for animation to become a form of recognized entertainment. On the flip side, once animation was recognized, why has the evolution gone so fast? One of the goals of this proposal is to bring to light innovations that the audience may not see before or rather thinks they have never seen before. It

will present technological innovation taking place at the intersection of socio cultural factors - (the capacity of animation studios and of individuals) - and of cognitive and biological factors. The archeological research will be based on a wide range of sources and artifacts that may be sometimes difficult to interpret. My goal is to get the most coherent picture together.

I do not plan to retell the story of how we got 'here' but rather to describe cycles of change during the history of animation. Sander van der Leeuw writes in *"Archeology of Innovation"* that "Observing the change of change is to observe how processes themselves change." Sander's concepts used in archeology help to describe slow processes of innovation and long correction cycles, the upscale and downscale of innovation from global to regional.



The above sketch illustrates a personal intuition about four Walt Disney movies created between 1937 and 1954. Each movie introduced new innovations with the multiplane camera (white column on the left side) shown in relationship with box office numbers (hatched column on the right side). Walt Disney received an honorary academy award for Snow White "as a significant screen innovation which has charmed millions and pioneered a great new entertainment field".

Living archeology of animation

The third part of my proposed research is the living archeology of animation which focuses on what is still to come. I will consider innovation as a way beyond our current situation. This part will outline the possibilities for new forms of animation, new ways to produce and distribute, and new viewer's experience.

There are questions regarding innovation. What are the consequences of innovation on the 'eco-system' of animation production, on the story, on the audience? How do people get access to innovation? Relevant questions, as animation studios can't afford to innovate with blind hope of an elusive pay back. The question is, can we innovate differently and more predictably? Where are tomorrow's true innovators? How does the funding for innovation flow? I will review the role and place of innovation in today's context of short-term economic returns, uncertainties about the nature of the audience and lack of clarity about the diversification of media. I will allow my ideas to flow and let the water define its level in this changing landscape.

Learning from the past is of course a good way to see what might happen in the future. The archeology of animation and living archeology of animation are both works in progress.

Some notes about the methodology

I plan to reference the innovations mentioned in this research according to the toolkit of improved

technologies presented by Sander van der Leeuw in his work on archeology of innovations. After contacting him and getting his feedback on this project, I plan to revise his classification in order to include current trends of innovation for animation.

Another domain of innovation for this proposal will be “collaborative thinking of creative people”. This includes groups of animators, educators and others who collaborate, use networks, process information and produce.