

Synopsis

This thesis is primarily concerned with the absence of a rational discourse in early animation, or the presence of animated life as a non-binary existence without death. This was the effect of the frame-by-frame animation process that allowed for manifest plasticity and metamorphosis to inform omnipotent characters. Enquiring such an image would bring forth a new dimension of thinking animation, and moving images in general, in terms of the impossibility of creating death. Life was doubly animated for early animation. Again, this non-binary existence would subvert causal imperatives. In addition, it does not go by the imperatives of scientific or linguistic understanding. Dominant theory, especially film theory, has largely misconstrued animation by only looking at it as an image form similar to cinema proper without accounting for the different reality that it posits. Due to such inappropriate positing of theory, animation's full potential in praxis has also remained largely unrealised. This thesis, in enquiring into the form tries to reclaim the erstwhile potential of animation in its conceptual essence. Therefore, it is crucial to summarise the answer to the fundamental query of the thesis.

Since animation is defined by the ability to endow forms with life, the primary enquiry of this thesis starts from a small problem: why would characters not die in early animation? The characters were malleable and did not die even when decapitated. However, if the same effects were to be applied to contemporary animation, it would possibly fracture or kill bodies violently. The early notion of deathlessness has shifted with ever increasing notions of realism afflicting the animated image. The contemporary image is informed by increasing sense of the hyperreal representation of the external world. This amounts to the creation and crossing over of multiple thresholds of epistemologisation resulting in a scientific and rational image, eventually culminating into the creation of mortal bodies within the animated image. Additionally, animated bodies are not morphable or plastic any more,

whether it is through internal volition or the impression of external force. With the eventual shift of the animated image towards its contemporary form, the concern about the loss of animation's erstwhile unique attributes has been ignored or forgotten. Animation cannot be distinguished from live action cinema any more, especially with respect to its conceptual essence. It seems that none of the studies find it essential to enquire why or how animated characters became mortal. This primary observation led to four fundamental questions, which consequently are addressed by the four chapters of this thesis.

The first question is what differentiates early animation from other forms of moving images, especially live action cinema? To answer this, the first highlight is the fundamental ontological difference of animation from live action imagery, both in terms of the expression form within the image and its creative process. Animation has been considered primarily as a form of cinema and therefore has been incorporated under film theory, without much focus on its ontological difference from cinema proper. But why? Is there some other fundamental problem afflicting theory in general that film theoreticians fail to notice? The answer to this lies in the "cinematographic illusion," as envisaged by Henri Bergson. According to Bergson, thought operates according to the same notion of false movement, as is the division of movement incorporated by the cinematic apparatus. Animation did not belong to this modality of thought. The frame-by-frame process of the construction of animated movement, which may be termed as the "animated illusion," is distinct from the cinematographic illusion. The exception is visible in its plastic form and discursive incoherence that deviates from the recorded image of the given. It resides outside of theoretical boundaries afforded by linguistic and scientific discourse.

Animation has mostly been treated as a subset of live action cinema. In fact, it is just the opposite. Animation is a superset of live action imagery, since it provides all devices and tropes available to cinema and more. Moreover, the unit of analysis differs for both. A

dictionary definition of animation not only talks about endowing forms with life but also about the frame-by-frame manipulation of images to produce the illusion of movement. For animation, it is the frame which is the unit of analysis vis-a-vis the shot corresponding to live action cinema. This possibility of spatial and temporal control of the frame gives animation its unique ability to generate heterotopy and heterochrony, the effect of free manipulation of space, time and forms. Since animation does not enter the binary structure of ordinary discourse, it renders scientific thought not as the given or natural, but as an opaque construction. Therefore, the categorial is manipulated through form and its movement.

The plastic image of animation could also show that form is force relation. And hence, the animated image can be considered to be a visual base of force relations, as a link of perception with the outside. Since perception is social, the image is a notional visual base, or a cartography of the whole social field. Moreover, it is a map of relations between forces informing a system of visibility. The visual base is a form of visual expression of the outside. The visual base is dynamic, and hence if we consider the dynamic moving image of screen animation, it would be similar to the Deleuzian concept of the diagram in certain ways, sans the movement. The diagram is static. The optical character of the non-discursive process produces lines of force, or knowledge and subjectivation through systems of light and language, resulting in the visual base. The visual base problematises the a priori and therefore the sense of synthetic knowledge. The visual base may be considered as the condition of possibility for discursive formation. If we extend the meaning of the visual base into the virtuality of a cartography of visibility, then the shifting image of animation could also be comprehended as the shifting nature of human subjectivity according to historical shifts of truth regimes. Therefore, the transformation of the dynamic visual base and its transition into the static diagram is the point of enquiry.

The analysis of the form cannot be independent of the material processes of animation production. Recorded live action imagery is transparent and unmarked in terms of scientific discourse since the form already appears as normal and natural. However, the manifest plastic nature of the animated image highlights that all forms and their movement is an effect of force relation. Moreover, since any form irrespective of their substance is subject to creative destruction in plastic movement, it highlights the impermanence of all forms. Animation, as the manifest image of force relations highlights the problem of the non-discursive image that is unable to enter discourse, and consequently is also resistant to formation of power/knowledge. Most importantly, since all forms are conditioned by volitional movement, life is immanently visible irrespective of substance categories. Therefore, as animation is not predicated on the given, it renders scientific discourse as opaque and marked.

The incoherent image of animation instead highlights the non-binary. It produces the problem of the non-dual existence of life without death, the existence of a multi-dimensional plastic space and time, and a general absence of relational binaries. This trickled into the subject matter of animation as well, where thresholds of epistemologisation such as pertaining to scientificity, ethics, or narrative coherence were not introduced. In other words, the image would have to cross over multiple thresholds of conceptual categories and thereby its form has to be refashioned to enter discourse. The entire trajectory of animation form and process has been the attempt to create such epistemological thresholds through which the animated image had to pass into the supposedly scientific and rational image. The resultant image became confined within such thresholds, which set limits upon bodies, substances or the individual.

To highlight a crucial attribute, representative substance was absent in early animation. Therefore, the materiality of forms were liable to change at will according to the needs of the graphic narrative. Seamless metamorphosis not only between forms but between

substances was possible. The substance informing forms is non-representative and dematerialised, which extends into the subject matter and a malleable narrative. Moreover, this dematerialised substance does not distinguish between life informing organic or inert matter. This produces a unique landscape informed by *athanasia*, residing outside of scientific discourse. Animation therefore became contradictory to dominant reason which fails to come to terms with the “irrationality” of life bereft of the binary opposition of death. Manifest force relations reveal that scientific life is represented through a triad of representations— of form, substance, and movement. Any one of the parameters of this triad when manipulated would destabilise the others and consequently the supposed “natural” or “scientific” relations of the given. Producing representative organic life is also introducing scientific life and consequently scientific and rational sense of death. Moreover, as is the popular coinage for animated life, the “undead” is something which has never been alive, or was not supposed to, is suddenly perceived as alive. However, the term undead already privileges death over life, by attributing life to select forms. On the contrary, animation extends the immanence of life upon everything, without the binary opposition of death. Moreover, in doing so, it extends both representational and non-representational form, substance and movement upon everything. Therefore, animated life appears as contradiction to scientific and rational life. The *telos* of animation has thus been the attempt to produce the coherence of representative substance and representative movement associated with form.

The second question is that, if animated forms were plastic and morphable, why was it necessary to remove it from the animated image? The form with a dematerialised substance, where appearance and reality coincide is a necessary effect of the animation process. Plastic and metamorphic movement, which is the result of the frame-by-frame process brings its own unique logic upon the world, without the need for its rationalisation. Resistance to dominant discourse is found where there is a relation between the familiar and reified, and its

subversion. According to Dana Polan, information ceases without a common code but also that it ceases if a transgression of codes do not appear. Plasticity simultaneously produces two contraries: the impermanence of all forms and the lack of structure informing the image, since it lacks the representational triad. Animation transforms static images according to two Heraclitean conceptions. According to the first, there is no being, everything is becoming. According to the other, being is the being of becoming as such. However, both senses of becoming would still inherit the conception of substance. Plasticity is instead not only ungraspable but also problematises the being of becoming as it destabilises the representational triad, effectively rendering form/substance as immaterial. The plastic and metamorphic image of animation in its dematerialised potential is the manifest form of non-representation.

Form organises matter. The animated image is an anomaly to such a relationship, where “its atomic structure seemingly comes unglued”. Therefore, if matter does not conform to any particular material property, how can substance be organised into form? The disjunction between substance and potential in animation releases form from adhering to its constituent matter. This is already potentially resistant to discursive formation. It is potentially revolutionary praxis although not necessarily political. However, resistance to discourse or ideology is also to exist outside of binary forms of knowledge. According to Deleuze, power operates through forces, while knowledge operates on formed matter. Plasticity and metamorphosis are anomalies, being the manifest disjunction of power and knowledge. Under such circumstances, it is the imperative of power to bring manifest plasticity within the ambit of knowledge. However, for the plastic image, substance is force relation, which is power. If plasticity cannot enter theory, it also resides outside of power as force cannot be envisaged. As form exists independent of substance in the plastic image, it thwarts representation and therefore, discursive formation. Consequently, plastic movement

renders signs into non-representational formations resulting in destabilised meanings. Thereby, the transgressive potential of the sign form exposes effects of power that can manifestly operate only through knowledge, which also highlights the relational co-dependency of concepts including that of scientific discourse. This makes the animated image as anterior to theoretical speculation, particularly to power/knowledge. Therefore, discourse needs an interiority of coherent relations between concepts that corroborate and assert each other. Without this interiority, power is brought into direct enquiry as it cannot operate without knowledge structures. Therefore, it is also the dissolution of force relations into a liminal state of affect.

The image of early animation points to a grounding on the repetition of difference, which amounts to a non-ground or groundlessness. The frame-by-frame process of animation makes it as the universality of the singular. Every frame is an actualised singularity as labour creates unique discrepancies between images in sequence. This discrepancy between individual frames in sequence would create an incoherent moving reality upon playback. This non-representational image is already a mode of resistance to the general dominance of representative thought. Moreover, the tactile process of animation was responsible for the conflation of sensuous objects and thought objects, where human activity is itself objective sensuous activity, thus problematising the difference between the ideal and the material planes. Subjective sensuous activity cannot be separated from objective material activity. Praxis of animation could therefore be consciously guided revolutionary practice. As has been amply worked out by many animators, formal resistance using plasticity can also be politically conscious.

Manifest plasticity is rendered from the playback of animation frames or actualised singularities. Its effect is the non-material volitional play of forms and the animation of desire. The line of drawn animation is desire formalised. This also applies to the form.

However, the transgressive capabilities of active force of desire is rendered reactive with the supposed objectivity imposing a rational order upon forms that arrives with the positing of thresholds of epistemologisation. Its result is consciousness, which is the tendency to find conformity with the given. The active force of desire banks on the lack of consciousness that allow for the potential of the virtual to flourish. The virtual condition is also the real condition based on which the actual is effected. Hence the virtual potential realised in terms of different actualities can be scrutinised in order to understand the real. The tendency to conform to the material dimension is constituted through objectifying discourse. The dialectics of plasticity directly addresses the totality constitutive of contradictory relations between oppositions, including the unity and separation of the subject and object, or the ideal and the material. Plasticity, by problematising object formation simultaneously problematises subjectivation. In other words, plasticity induces non-separation as the subject and the object dissolve in the plasticity of forms. In fact, the fissures between subjective self unity and social unity of acting subjects is also problematised with non-separation. This is also how plasticity directly engages with animism, as a transitional stage between prelogical thought unifying subject and object, and logical thought that separates the subject from the object.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, the government of the animated image is necessitated in order to create some basis for the production of knowledge from this state of groundlessness. Plasticity could be reactive and transgressive if social structures are construed to be repressive or standardising. On the other hand, with normative powers, plasticity could be tamed and deviations from the norm are minimised. The telos of animation is the making of such a scientific normative.

This leads us to the third question. Has the conceptual definition of animation shifted with the shifting normative? If so, then what does the changing form indicate? More importantly, since most of the erstwhile animation form resided outside of scientific and

linguistic codification, what really does the uncoded aspects of the image indicate? If the uncoded aspects have eluded theory, then surely the animated image is a glaring visible indicator of the verbal historical unconscious informing a transitioning episteme. In that sense, the shifting image is also an indicator of a shifting *a priori*, which is the sense of the historical transcendental. The form of the visible residing outside of definitive meanings is the concern of this analysis. The changing character of the animated image, especially its uncoded aspects can therefore showcase more than meets the eye. It portrays the changing sense of the historical unconscious. In addition, it also depicts the changing nature of the historical transcendental. Ultimately, representative substance is rendered by setting limits on plasticity and morphability to create representation that can enter discourse. The shifting form is hence the visible indicator of the shifting conditions of possibility of discursive formation.

The historical unconscious defines an epistemological space specific to a particular period which reveals a positive unconscious of knowledge that eludes the consciousness of scientists and yet is part of scientific discourse (Foucault 2005, xii). Foucault would call this positivity, which defines a field of historical emergence as the historical *a priori*. Foucault proposes an *a priori* fully given in history and which changes with history. Yet, this *a priori* nonetheless lies beyond it in defining the conditions of possibility from which the knowledge of an epoch can form. According to Beatrice Han, Foucault's archaeological project is interested in finding the historical transcendental. And if the historical *a priori* has to define the conditions of possibility, themselves variable and from which the knowledge of an epoch has to form, then it must be a network of relations between concepts and categories internally coherent and codependently originated. In that sense, Foucault attempts to find a historical transposition of the transcendental. However, since the verbal is predicated on the visual and the uncoded of the visual resides outside of discourse and is yet part of the archive, the incoherent image showcases the unconscious bearings of the shifting historical

transcendental. Therefore, the shifting animated image as a visual base reveals the transition of the conditions of possibility towards the scientific and the rational, by setting limiting thresholds to forms, substances and movement. In the process, the prelogical plasticity crosses over multiple thresholds of epistemologisation, from scientificity, narrative coherence, literal action to metaphorical action, or ethics in order to enter discourse. It develops as both a conscious and an unconscious structural imperative quasi-independently of the people involved in co-creating the image.

“Power ‘produces reality’ before it represses. Equally it produces truth before it ideologises, abstracts or masks” (Deleuze 2006, 29). Knowledge concerns formed matters (substances) and formalised functions according to formal conditions of seeing and speaking, light and language. The plastic image of animation is dematerialised, and does not conform to rational visibilities or discursive coherence. Division and separation codifies animation into the positive production of the negative, or difference as comparison. This manifests as the diagrammatic image of power. It is also the creation of a picture plane or a window by dividing the surface of the screen. The non-discursive animation process and environment gradually finds a telos of transformation towards a discursive interiority. However, power alone may not be able to account for this formation.

The effects of power are realised through the influx of capital in the image. The shifting image also depicts a shifting sense of the subject-object divide. Labour under capitalism is a historically specific socially mediating activity. Commodity and capital as products of concrete labour are objectified forms of social mediation. Subjectivity is a relation between mediated social relations and thought. Marx’s conception is a materialist justification of Hegel’s conception of the dialectic. Marx conceptualises capital in similar terms as Hegel does to his concept of the Geist. This he does through value, which operates as an automatic subject. Through the self-valorising nature of value which continuously takes

the form of commodity and money while changing its own magnitude, value suddenly acquires the nature of a self-moving substance. The constructed image, as much as commodity and money are mere objectified forms of value. For Marx, the self-valorising nature of value operates as an automatic subject. Value suddenly acquires the nature of self-moving substance which Marx characterises as the “Subject”. The plastic image of animation, which manifestly problematises subject-object dualism, becomes subjected to the imperatives of value and hence capitalist social relations. This occurs as the value transforms the supposedly valueless plastic non-representational affective substance into representative rational scientific substance, the image turning into a representation of the world of commodities.

Marx envisages a social theory of consciousness inasmuch as he identifies subjectivity as distinguished from the sociohistorical Subject. Instead of conceiving an identical subject-object, Marx shifts the focus from a knowing subject and its relations to an external world to that of social relations as determinations of both social subjectivity and objectivity. Marx accords historical specificity to his conception of the Subject residing in the alienated social structures characteristic of capitalism. The problem of knowledge is therefore a relation between forms of social mediation and forms of thought (Postone 2006, 77). The shifting visual base becomes the image of the “Subject,” which is capitalist social relations as an alienated form and a determinant of both social subjectivity and objectivity (primarily as commodity). Discursive relations under capitalism has to first be predicated on the scientific rational form before a supposedly coherent narrative can emerge.

Ultimately, the image falls back into reifying subject-object dualism by maximising the distance and division between subject and object. The transition of bodies from being amortal to becoming mortal corroborates this shifting subject-object relationship. This is not only a shift of internal and volitional force relations informing the body to its transformation

into external control of the bodily form. Since the constructed image is the manifestation of both social subjectivity and objectivity, the externally controlled body or identifying with it translates into the objectivation of the subject. As labour has been already alienated, the imperative of capital as dead labour is to externally control bodies through ossification. This fails, as ossified bodies informed by overlapping and conflictual structures and discursivities would result in rational but soulless movements. The telos of the animation process, while consciously attempting to produce photorealism and representative movement, has unconsciously shifted into producing the movement of the dead. Specifically, it firstly replaces the immanence of life with the immanence of death, and subsequently tries to imbibe the dead with life. The telos of animation has thus been the transition from a primal protoplasmic substance informing all life forms into selectively endowing the desireless dead with scientific life. Substance is therefore divided up into specific rationalities of organic life form, inanimate, dead or the undead, but no longer the animated.

This is not without consequences. With the intent of creating rational bodies, a threshold is reached where subjective identification with bodies would lead to the uncanny. Since the meaning of heimlich develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich, the uncanny can also be generated when life tends to come into close proximity with death. In fact, with the movement of the dead, the undead actually crosses over the epistemological threshold of animated life to the immanence of scientific death. However, this relationship is inverted where the subject and object roles are reversed. Capital, which is the image of dead labour, is the dead Subject. This is precisely seen as the manifest image of “bare death”. Proximity to the idea of “reality” would generate the possibility of the “uncanny valley,” as revulsion in identifying with a dead object. Fear is latent in the identification with mortal bodies. Therefore, codification showcases the subjection and control of bodies to mortality and their eventual administration through fear.

Social subjectivity is informed by latent death, while fear of violence/death becomes immanent within this understanding. This culminates into the administration of fear.

The fourth and final question is, given that animation is informed by the aforementioned set of differences from rational imagery, how does one address case studies using conventional film theory? Theory has failed to address the changing form with an adaptive framework, particularly because the image has not been considered through an archaeological approach taking into account the historical shifts of the image. It is clear that film theoreticians have failed to notice the conceptual transitions from animated life towards bodily death, from the non-representational to representation, the transition of conditions of possibility, or the inversion of subject-object relations.

Most studies are focused on the supposed meaning (content) over the image form (expression), although the latter holds much significance as meaning is predicated on the discursive specificities of the form. The “animated illusion” manifestly illustrates such discursive specificities. Therefore, the animation form has to be analysed as a condition of possibility for the emergence of discourse specific to individual films. It should be remembered that animation not only resists the established categories but generates a different kind of the categorial. Therefore, animation is the totality of mediated social relations and thought, which ultimately manifests as the condition of possibility for a social theory of consciousness. In fact, the categorial is not only historical and geographical but also shifts with ideology and the animated image is the crucial diffusion between scientific discourse and ideology. This creates a curious problem for theory as the animated image would continuously problematise the sense of the a priori.

With animated illusion, plasticity and incoherence of movement is the condition of possibility for the categorial synthesis of space, time or substance. The image form is the manifest visual base of the non-discursive process, and the link to the articulable emerging as

a network of statements. Moreover, the non-discursive process goes through transition to ultimately be transformed into the manifest structural environment as a virtual space within which the image operates. The primacy of texts over the image changes the visible form according to the articulable. In order to discipline the animation form, which is maximising the “government” of the image, the possibility of the transgressive is brought within the ambit of power/knowledge by binding form, substance and material potential, i.e. representative movement. Knowledge segments the image into its spatiality, the screen likewise converted from the flatness of surface to the window looking into the interiority of an illusory space. The non-discursive environment transforms accordingly into a layered diagram of the multiplane camera to the overarching structure of the volumetric software environment for computer generated imagery that ultimately translates into rationalised and scientific material potential.

As a side effect, this trajectory also entails the formation of certain other categories like difference as relation/comparison, negative volumetric interiority, positive volume, or life and its negation in death. Typically, the visible becomes the codified construction of Manichaeian binaries, of light as brightness/darkness, colour as warmth/coldness, music as major/minor chords differentiating protagonist/antagonist and the like. Less apparent is the ideological baggage imbibed into the average audience from discursive knowledge, translating into good/bad or right/wrong or the self/other. Theorising animation from its erstwhile non-dual framework is surely different from a dualist framework informed by linguistic and scientific binaries. The intent is to figure out what the image was vis-a-vis what it became, whether there has been a concomitant ontological and conceptual shift of the image with the changing process. The normative for animation is different for different films, and therefore, theory must adapt to the specifics of individual films, in terms of differences of form, process, narrative content, influx of capital, historical context or categorial conceptions.

In fact, animation analysis has to include the historical specificity of both the form and the process as a condition of possibility for the emergence of a specific discourse, as the shifting sense of the normal.

For animation, the visual had primacy over discourse. The transition of animated movement privileging the visual over discourse into the primacy of the articulable over the visible would help to theoretically situate a film from the unique perspective of animation proper. This would enable theorising animation films according to the animated illusion. Interrogating animation using this method is anterior to film theory. And if film theory can theorise animation without facing difficulties, then the animated illusion has been replaced by the cinematographic illusion for the film concerned. Animated life is no longer possible and has already succumbed to the imperatives of bodily death within a world of representation. In that case, is it animation any more?

The intent of this thesis is to find an approach that would ultimately help reclaim animation to its erstwhile potential, open up new possibilities and approaches to animating and consequently address the issue of homogeneity induced by contemporary technologies. Since the mainstream form has a hegemonic presence that stifles individual and peripheral approaches, a theory questioning the ascendancy of the dominant form could help reclaim the lost potential of animation. In addition, it has laid down a course of enquiry into the hegemonic mainstream form of animation, which could open up alternative possibilities and inform new discourses from individual or peripheral productions with limited labour and capital resources. Significantly, once the codification process is exposed, animation can be rethought from contexts outside of the dominant normative. Questioning and transgressing the reified forms would open up pathways to alternative forms of praxis that can be politically conscious design.

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