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INTRODUCTION

ALAN CHOLODENKO

I

THE ILLUSION OF LIFE 2: More Essays on Animation follows on from *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE: Essays on Animation* (1991), the world's first book of scholarly essays theorizing animation, published by Power Publications in association with the Australian Film Commission. Even as the first book was generated by an event—*THE ILLUSION OF LIFE*—the world's first international conference on animation and Australia's first large-scale international festival of animation (1988),¹ *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE 2* was generated by one—*THE LIFE OF ILLUSION*—Australia's second international conference on animation (1995). (For details of its program, see the Appendix.)

THE LIFE OF ILLUSION was mounted by the Power Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Sydney in association with The Japan Foundation and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA for short) and had the dual venues of the Japan Cultural Centre and the MCA's American Express Foundation Hall for its three day event. It was affiliated with *KABOOM!: Explosive Animation from America and Japan*, Australia's first animation exhibition, curated by Philip Brophy at the MCA November 12, 1994-March 5, 1995. Like *KABOOM!*, the subject of *THE LIFE OF ILLUSION* conference was post-World War II animation in the United States and Japan. It too had as its foci: in terms of the United States, the work of Robert (Bob) Clampett and Ralph Bakshi and more recent TV animation, especially John Kricfalusi's *Ren & Stimpy*; in terms of Japan, the work of Osamu Tezuka and Hayao Miyazaki and more recent techno-animation.

The overseas guests were Kosei Ono, Japan's leading expert on comics and animation, and Fred Patten, one of America's foremost commentators on *manga* (Japanese comics), *anime* (Japanese animation) and science fiction. These historians were joined by 17 Australian theorists of animation to produce an event with sophisticated and fascinating historical and theoretical perspectives, an event offering provocative, complex and challenging takes on animation, many mobilizing 'poststructuralist' and 'postmodernist' approaches to the subject such as informed *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* conference and book. Some of the participating Australian scholars were already acknowledged for their essays in that book.

THE LIFE OF ILLUSION conference proved to be a worthy sequel to *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE*—event and book. With its publication, this new volume continues and extends the work in the theory of animation of *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* and *THE LIFE OF ILLUSION* conference.² It provides an abundance of understandings, approaches, qualifications, correctives and challenges to scholars not only in animation studies but in Film (i.e. live action cinema) Studies. It proceeds on the supposition that animation studies and Film Studies are not separate, nor are they identical, and that the relations of one to the other call for intense, rigorous, scholarly theoretical inquiry. This is especially so as film, under the increasing impact of computer generated animation or imagery (CGI)—which we can simply call computer animation—reveals itself to be what it arguably was never not—animation! (a point which I shall elaborate in subsequent Parts of this Introduction). Indeed, *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE 2*, like its predecessor, offers rewards to disciplines across the spectrum—from the humanities to the physical sciences and technology (a point to which I shall return in Part IV of this Introduction.)

The remit of this Introduction is to characterize what has happened since the publication of *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* to animation (Part I) and writing on animation (Part II), to contextualize further and describe the essays in this volume (Part III) and to present a final few key ideas and issues for the theorizing of animation (Part IV). The enormity of what has occurred means that there is much to cover. The length of this Introduction is testament to that enormity

and byproduct of an effort to do justice to it and to how *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* and *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE 2* relate to it for the reader (and the various constituencies composing it).

In this regard, in my Introduction to *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* book, I suggested a number of reasons for that book and the event that generated it. *They are still apt* and apply to this book, animating it as they did *THE LIFE OF ILLUSION* conference; and I shall tease them out as I go.

The first reason was to begin to remedy the state of neglect in which animation had existed both as a film practice and as an object of theoretical inquiry—the neglect of animation by the popular and mass media forms of publication and legitimation and by the institution of Film Studies. But before I address what has happened in terms of that neglect since the publication of *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE* in 1991 (Part II), I will sketch in this first Part what has happened to animation as a film practice since.

What has happened is a quantum increase, expansion and diversification in animation production, distribution, exhibition and consumption around the world. It would not be amiss to call it a renaissance even, especially as, meaning rebirth, it is a term of animation. First, there has been an explosion of animation films in the classic drawn mode (or in the computer simulation of it) from the commercial studios in the United States and Japan—the two powerhouses in the field. (Japan is number one and the United States number two at present.)³

In the U.S., taking off from *The Little Mermaid* (1989)—the subject of an essay in this volume—Disney has produced over a dozen animation features for theatrical release, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994)—the subject of two essays herein—and most recently *Home on the Range* (2004). In combination with Disney, John Lasseter's Pixar Animation Studio has brought to the big screen *Toy Story* (1995), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Toy Story 2* (1999), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), the Academy Award winning *Finding Nemo* (2003)—which surpassed *The Lion King* as the highest grossing animated film of all time—and *The Incredibles* (2004). DreamWorks SKG has made *Antz* (1998), *The Prince of Egypt* (1998), *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), the Academy Award winning *Shrek*

(2001), *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* (2002), *Shrek 2* (2004)—poised to surpass *Finding Nemo* as the highest grossing animation film ever—and *Shark Tale* (2004). MTV Productions and Paramount Pictures have given us *Beavis and Butt-head Do America* (1996); Nickelodeon *The Rugrats Movie* (1998), *Rugrats in Paris: The Movie* (2000), *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* (2001) and *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* (2002); Turner *Tom and Jerry: The Movie* (1992), *Cats Don't Dance* (1997) and with Warner Bros. *Quest for Camelot* (1998); Warner Bros. *The Iron Giant* (1999), *Osmosis Jones* (2001) and *The Polar Express* (2004)⁴; and Blue Sky Studios and Fox Animation Studios *Titan A.E.* (2000) and *Ice Age* (2002).⁵

As for the lush array of feature animation films made in Japan—the subject of six essays in this book—I need to first observe that while Hayao Miyazaki was producing more and more features for domestic release in Japan in the 1980s, Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988) led the charge of *anime* into theatrical release in the West. It was a watershed moment for not only the animation relations of Japan and the U.S. but world animation. 1991 and beyond has seen Miyazaki's *Porco Rosso* (1992), *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and the Academy Award winning *Spirited Away* (2001)—which also won the Golden Bear for Best Film at the 2002 Berlin Film Festival and is the top-grossing film to date in Japan—arrive in the West and, like *Akira*, gain theatrical release. (In fact, since 1996, Walt Disney Enterprises has distributed Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli films in the U.S. and Canada, while more recently, Columbia Tristar has distributed Shinichiro Watanabe's *Cowboy Bebop* (2001) and DreamWorks Satoshi Kon's *Millennium Actress* (2001). (Kon is increasingly emerging as one of contemporary Japan's most significant animators.)

At the same time, feature films from other key Japanese directors and what are now over 20 studios have been released on video (including animation films made specifically for video release, called OVAs—Original Video Animations, sometimes written OAVs—Original Animation Videos) and DVD overseas, including in Australia. These include Hiroyuki Kitakubo's *Roujin-Z* (1991), Kenichi Sonada's OVA *Rhea Gall Force* (1989) and OVA series *Bubblegum Crash* (1991), Hideki Takayama's *Overfiend* film trilogy (constructed from his 1987 OVA series *Urotsukidoji*, released in English

in the early '90s), Hiroshi Fukutomi's *Battle Angel Alita* (1993), Buichi Terasawa's *Takeru* (1993), Isao Takahata's *Pom Poko* (1994), Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Patlabor 2* (1995), Satoshi Kon's *Perfect Blue* (1998), Otomo's *Spriggan* (1998), Hiroyuki Okiura's *Jin-Roh (Man-Wolf)* (1999), Kitakubo's *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000), Yoshiaki Kawajiri's *Vampire Hunter D* (2000), Fumihiko Takayama's *Patlabor 3* (2002), Kon's *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003), Otomo's *Steam Boy* (2004) and Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004).

Second, there has been an increasing popularity of model animation, for example, *James and the Giant Peach* (1995), a hybrid combining model animation (plus some computer animation) with live action (at head and tail), a U.S./UK production joining Walt Disney Pictures, Allied Filmmakers and Skellington Productions. Especially popular has been claymation, singularly that of England's Nick Park and Peter Lord and their Aardman Animation feature *Chicken Run* (2000) and their wonderful Wallace and Gromit shorts—films like *A Grand Day Out* (1990) and the three Oscar winners: *Creature Comforts* (1990), *The Wrong Trousers* (1993) and *A Close Shave* (1995). As well, and following in the Oscar-winning footsteps of Aardman, Australian Adam Elliot's Academy Award winning claymation short *Harvey Krumpet* (2003) calls for mention. Acknowledgement must also be given the puppet animation of *Team America: World Police* (2004), by *South Park's* Trey Parker and Matt Stone, among other things a homage to the '60s TV series *The Thunderbirds*.

Third, there has been the increasing proliferation of 'hyperhybrid' 'live action' films using special effects animation, likewise increasingly computer animated—usually science fiction and/or horror films, but some transposing favoured comic book superheroes to the screen.⁶ Taking off from James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989), these have included such American films as his *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), Robert Zemeckis' *Death Becomes Her* (1992), Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* (1992), Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), Chuck Russell's *The Mask* (1994), Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994), Ronald Donaldson's *Species* (1995), Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996), Tom Shadyac's *The Nutty Professor* (1996), Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997), Emmerich's *Godzilla* (1998), George Lucas' *Star Wars: Episode*

1—*The Phantom Menace* (1999), Larry and Andy Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999), Bryan Singer's *X-Men* (2000), Simon West's *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), Chris Columbus' *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001), Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002), Ang Lee's *The Hulk* (2003), Jonathan Mostow's *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (2003) and *Kill Bill, Vol. 2* (2004). The list is enormous and growing daily.⁷

And fourth, there has been the advent of totally computer animated feature animation films, starting in 1995 with John Lasseter's *Toy Story*, followed by Pixar's other features, as well as those of DreamWorks SKG, plus Fox's *Ice Age* (2002) and Disney's *Dinosaur* (2000). And to these must be added Hironobu Sakaguchi and Moto Sakakibara's *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001), an American/Japanese co-production. In this regard, one must also cite the pioneering totally computer animated shorts from John Lasseter and Pixar: *Luxo Jr.* (1986), *Red's Dream* (1987), *Knickknack* (1989), *Mike's New Car* (2003), and Lasseter/Pixar's three Academy Award winning shorts—*Tin Toy* (1988), *Geri's Game* (1997) and *For the Birds* (2000).

This proliferation and saturation of film animation for theatre and home (on videos and DVDs, as OVAs from Japan) is also complemented by the increase in the number of animation film festivals. The well-established annual international ones—at Anney, Bristol (The Animation Festival, Bristol has morphed into Animated Encounters there), Los Angeles (the Los Angeles International Animation Celebration has been revived in World Animation Celebration Los Angeles), Ottawa, Zagreb, Hiroshima, Krok (in Russia)—and the new one—Cartoons on the Bay (in Italy)—have been supplemented by local ones, including in Australia. While *THE LIFE OF ILLUSION* gave the Australian premiere to five *anime* as part of the event (see the program in the Appendix), Australia's first *anime* festival—the *JAPANIME* festival—was held in Sydney in 2000, followed two years later by Sydney's second—the *JAPANIME 02* festival (also presented in Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra)—both curated and directed by Deborah Szapiro. In their wake, a number of *anime* features have been screened in Sydney, the latest being the *Miyazaki Showcase* of five films. Australia also has

the Brisbane International Animation Festival, created by Festival Director Peter Moyes, and the Melbourne International Animation Festival.⁸

There are as well signs of the gradual acceptance of the animated film on the larger festival circuit. Miyazaki's win at Berlin two years ago is testimony, as is the acceptance into competition at the Cannes International Film Festival of *Shrek*, and more recently, of both Oshii's new *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) and *Shrek 2*. So, too, is the new Oscar for Animated Feature Film.⁹ Locally, the Melbourne International Film Festival has included animation programs curated by Philip Brophy, featuring the work of Osamu Tezuka and Studio Ghibli.

Beyond such modes of distribution, exhibition and consumption of animated film lies television, where the use of animation is a staple. It even has dedicated channels—Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Fox Kids and the Disney Channel—offering an incredible range of animation, from—to select among too many—*The Bugs Bunny Show*, *The Tom and Jerry Show* and *Tiny Toon Adventures* to *The Simpsons*, *Ren & Stimpy*, *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*, *Beavis and Butt-head*, *King of the Hill*, *South Park* and *Futurama*, from *Pokémon* and *Sailor Moon* to *Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, from *Crapston Villas* and *Pond Life* to Eastern European and Australian art animation, and—in terms of made-for-television computer animation—from France's *Les fables géométriques* (1989-1992) and *Insektors* (1993) and the Canadian studio Mainframe Entertainment's 1994 'ReBoot' series to *The Simpsons'* episode *Homer³* (1995) (with its partial use of computer animation) and Japan's *Robot Wars*—Japan's several decades of cel animated robot series and the English-speaking world's *Robotech* morphed into computer generated 3D form.¹⁰

Furthermore, animation—be it film, video or computer animation—on TV is used for commercials, for station and program idents, and for MTV rock video clips, most notably Michael Jackson's computer animated *Black or White* (1991), directed by John Landis and produced by Pacific Data Images (which also did the computer animation in *Homer³*). Jackson's clip has received much popular comment, as well as scholarly attention, for its use of morphing.

Then there is the computer, where more and more animation

is coming on-line. The computer offers animated games (as does video), advertisements, even sites explicitly dedicated to animation, including cataloguing, exhibiting and promoting it.¹¹

In other words, we have experienced an exponential leap of animation in our media, in the systems which deliver it and in its popularity, too. Indeed, for Ben Crawford, the animation in our media is but a part of a larger process, one that he maps in his essay in this volume: the expansion, following the Disney model, of commercial animation into an animation entertainment-industrial complex, one composed of networks proliferating ever increasing forms and experiences of animation, including through merchandising, licensing of character properties, marketing cross-promotions and tie-ins, studio stores, theme parks, websites (including The Animation World Store on awn.com), etc.

To pass from description to overt theorizing here: for me this immersion in animation in and by the media (even including the entertainment-industrial complex as media) has increasingly, uncannily, brought something uncanny 'home': animation 'itself'. Put simply, we are increasingly discovering that we and the world swim in a sea of media, and vice versa. And we are increasingly finding that the nature of not only what swims in that sea but of that sea itself is animation 'as such', which for us it has always been. In other words, for us, not only do all the media (film, television, the computer, etc.) show animation, they are *themselves as media* of the order of animation. The media are animate—animators, animated and animating. In my Introduction to *THE ILLUSION OF LIFE*, I claimed that not only is animation a form of film, film—all film—is a form of animation. (I will return to this claim in Part II.) To extend that point: not only is animation a form of the media, the media—all media, including film—are forms of animation, or rather forms of reanimation: reanimators.¹²

And that animation/reanimation in and of media has reached tidal wave, or better tsunami, proportions, what I call *hyperanimation*—an increasingly extreme, increasingly engulfing phenomenon, in terms of not only all aspects and modalities of context and performance but all aspects and modalities of form and content. This tsunami is for me signified by the Matthew Martin logo that graces the cover of

this new volume, one aptly after the Japanese artist Hokusai. And I should add: after the Greek sea god Proteus, too, singular sign for me of the reanimations, the 'transformations'—the 'extreme makeovers', the 'ultimate transformations'—occurring 'within' and 'without' the media, including not only within but between the 'West' and the 'East'. As well, Proteus is inescapably for us singular figure of Sergei Eisenstein's notion of 'protean plasmaticness'—that formless form that, giving all form, is itself ungivable as such¹³—which is for him the essence of animation, sign for me of the *animatic*, which various of the essays in this book in different ways instantiate.¹⁴

And this animation tsunami applies to the fans, too. The new generation is not composed only of kids (not that Chuck Jones and the folks at Warner Bros. animation ever thought its audience was). Animation has now on offer a range of products for consumers of all ages, genders, etc., from kids to adolescents to adults (though for me, and in ways that are profound for the thinking of animation, they all qualify at the same time as 'kids of all ages'!). Here Japan has been for us the leader, its *anime* offering a significantly wider range of genre, subject matter and theme than classic Western animation. Indeed, as Deborah Szapiro declares, in Japan, animation films are 'part of the mainstream'¹⁵; and they are becoming increasingly so in the West (although we could as well say that they have already become so if we include computer animated feature films, especially the hyperhybrid 'live action'/animation films, in our consideration¹⁶). Australian correspondent Alexa Moses states:

The animated feature film is experiencing a popularity not seen since the glory days of Disney. That's backed up by the \$37 million box office returns for *Finding Nemo*, which made it Australia's highest earning film last year. *Shrek II*...is already the top-grossing animated film of all time in the US.¹⁷

As for the fans, there is a Japanese term for one who is fanatically devoted to *anime*—'*otaku*'—a term well known across the English speaking world, this itself a sign that animation is increasingly taking 'centre stage' globally for 'kids of all ages'.¹⁸ A new generation of consumers is ready to immerse itself and disappear in this

sea of animation in and of the media. And crucially, the increasingly extreme, *hyperanimate* life and motion in and of this sea increasingly reanimates the world and its fans (ourselves) in its animation, for fans become hyperfans. Or shall we not say simply *fanatics*, as defined by Chuck Jones in terms of his rules for one Wile E. Coyote:

RULE 3. 'THE COYOTE COULD STOP ANYTIME—IF HE WERE NOT A FANATIC. (REPEAT: 'A FANATIC IS ONE WHO REDOUBLES HIS EFFORT WHEN HE HAS FORGOTTEN HIS AIM'.—GEORGE SANTAYANA).¹⁹

Such redoubling cannot but recall Jean Baudrillard's definition of the ecstatic, of *hypertelia*—that extreme, exponential process of pushing things to the limits where they at once fulfill and annihilate themselves—precisely characterizing contemporary hyperreality, increasingly the only 'reality'. It is a process of escalation, of intensification, of maximalization,²⁰ where things function all the better for having been liberated from their idea, content, referent, aim, etc., a process privileged by the cartoon and by the contemporary form of animation—hyperanimation—even as experiencing and partaking in such animation becomes the sole passion of the hyperfan.²¹ It is a passion encapsulated for me in these words of Baudrillard: 'Since the world drives to a delirious state of things, we must drive to a delirious point of view'.²²

For us, the media, the world and the fans have been caught up in the same hyperreal, hyperbolic, hyped-up, 'ground-breaking', 'envelope-pushing', 'mind-blowing', 'adrenalin-rushing', 'jaw-dropping', 'eye-popping', 'ear-shattering', 'hair-raising', 'heart-pounding', 'heart-stopping', 'breath-taking', 'nerve-wrenching', 'gut-wrenching', 'bone-crunching', 'in your face', paroxysmic, ecstatic, hypertelic game of pushing things to their limits, 'over the top', 'to the max', 'to infinity and beyond!'—an 'action-packed', 'high-impact', 'high performance', 'performance-enhanced', 'dynamite', 'totally awesome', 'stop you in your tracks', 'drop dead', 'scare you to death', 'life-threatening', 'death-defying', 'block-busting', 'roller coaster', 'collision course', 'thrill ride', at 'warp speed', at 'terminal velocity'—adventure on 'the brink of disaster', catastrophe,

apocalypse—singularly exemplified and performed for us by post-World War II hyperreal, hypertelic film animation in Japan and the U.S. The extreme states and extreme sensations of explosive entertainment! (Implosive, too, at the same time.) ‘Fast films’, like fast food, offering a ‘quick fix’, a ‘quick change’, all ‘super-sized’ and ‘at the speed of live’.²³

Or, on the other hand, it can be slow, or rather, hyperslow. The only requirement is that, whatever the process, it be hyper, that is, the ‘*more x than x*’, and that it apply to *all* qualities, categories, operations, etc., and in *all* spheres, *the subject included*—for example, the hyperfast (the faster than fast), the hyperslow (the slower than slow), the hypertrophic or hyperlarge (the larger than large), the atrophic, or hypersmall (the smaller than small), the hyperobese, the hyperobscene, the hypersexual, the hyperviolent, the hyperterrorist, the hyperhostage, the hypergraphic, the hypershocking, the hyperloud, the hypersoft, the hyperdefined (hi-fi), the hyperundefined, etc. All things tend in the direction of the hyper. Here, media become hyperanimate *hypermedia*, hyperreal, pure and empty, third and fourth order simulations, viral vital virtualities, virtual realities, living and moving in the world and us, as at the same time the world and we live and move in them, *hypercryptically*, *hyperanimatically*, making it increasingly impossible to say which is which—which media, which world, which ourselves²⁴—the immersing effect of media in the immediate by media, hence world and ourselves, become *immedia*.²⁵ All things tend in this direction: the *hypermediatic*.

II

Since 1991, the neglect of animation as a film practice by the popular and mass media forms of publication and legitimation has been on the wane, especially it seems in light of two key developments.²⁶ One was the explosion in production and consumption of both American and Japanese feature length animation, including the increasing dissemination of the latter to the West (something whose nature and implications I consider in Part III of this Introduction). In this regard, as I indicated in Part I, Australia had its first animation



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