

Review of the historical perspective animation essay



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This section in my dissertation focuses not on the history of animation per se but on the evolution and progress of animation in films and in particular claymation which is one form of stop-motion animation.

The desire to animate is as old as art itself. Animation is a form of movie magic with its origins in art form. The earliest examples are still drawings, found in Palaeolithic cave paintings depicting animals with multiple sets of legs in superimposed positions, that attempted to convey the illusion of movement. While such images came to life through fairy tales and folk lore, it was only during the 19th century -when inventions were made to make motion picture- that animated pictures became a real possibility.

A live -action film and an animated film are different because the live -action camera captures a scene moving in real time, automatically freezing into separate still pictures that can then be projected on to a screen. In an animation film, the animator, on the contrary, can not film anything until and unless he/ she creates through drawings(2D animation) or models (3 D animation) or computer imagery every single frame of a film from scratch. While animation is definitely a highly creative medium, it entails time-consuming processes for an animator who should have vision, faith in the concept and creation, abundant patience and capacity for sustained efforts.

THE DEVICES:

The development of devices from crude form to highly technical gadget has played a key role in evolution of animation over the years.

The earliest device to create an image of a moving picture is known as Zoetrope, invented in China around 180 AD. The modern day zoetrope
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contraption was produced in 1834 by William George Horner and is considered to be the beginning of the animation devices. The device is basically a cylinder with vertical slits around the sides. Around the inside edge of the cylinder there are a series of pictures on the opposite side to the slits. As the cylinder is spun, the user then looks through the slits producing the illusion of motion. Actually, even in present day animation classes for the beginners, the Zoetrope is being used to explain the early concepts of animation.

The magic lantern, believed to have originated from China in the 16th century, is the precursor to the modern day projector. It consisted of a translucent oil painting and a simple lamp. When put together in a darkened room, the image would appear larger on a flat surface.

The most significant early day animation device was Phenakistoscope (1831) disc, invented simultaneously by the Belgian Joseph Plateau and the Austrian Simon von Stampfer. The photographic sequence experiments done by English-born American Eadweard Muybridge in 1872, using 24 still cameras set up along side horse race track, have been of help to later generation of animators.

The animated film took a major step thanks to a sophisticated version of Zoetrope, known as Praxinoscope, invented by French scientist Charles-Émile Reynaud in 1877, a painter of lantern-slides. It used the same basic mechanism of a strip of images placed on the inside of a spinning cylinder, but instead of viewing it through slits, it was viewed in a series of small, stationary mirrors around the inside of the cylinder, so that the animation

would stay in place, and provide a clearer image and better quality. After fifteen years of hard work, Reynaud also developed a larger version of the praxinoscope, an animation system using loops of 12 pictures, that could be projected onto a screen, called the Théâtre Optique, first demonstrated at the Musee Grevin, Paris in 1892, comprising 500 pictures on a transparent strip of gelatin. This was the first animation film entitled 'Pantomimes Lumineuses' which lasted up to fifteen minutes. Reynaud's films were simple tales mainly concerned with love and rivalry. Reynaud used drawings rather than photographic images, and every subsequent animated film using line animation -from Felix the Cat and Micky Mouse to the Rugrats and the Simpsons -is a successor to the moving pictures that he created.

Flip Book, patented in 1868 by a John Barns Linnet, was another development that brought us closer to modern animation. The Flip Book creates the illusion of motion through a set of sequential pictures flipped at a high speed. The Mutoscope (1894) is basically a flip book in a box with a crank handle to flip the pages. 1919 marked the invention of rotoscope.

While Emile Reynaud, showed the first animated film using his Theatre Optique system in 1882, three years later, two French brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumiere, presented the first authentic demonstration of what we now think of as cinema. Lumiere Brothers' characters were images of real people and hence overshadowed the Emile Reynaud's presentations of moving drawings.

Humorous Phases of Funny Faces made by J. Stuart Blackton in 1906, featuring a cartoonist drawing faces on a chalkboard, and the faces

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apparently coming to life, can be termed as the first animated work on standard picture film. This film was released by Vitagraph. Two years later, the French director Émile Cohl (also called Émile Courtet), created *Fantasmagorie* which was screened for the first time on August 17, 1908 at Theatre du Gymnase in Paris. It was Émile Cohl who relocated to New York City in 1912, spread its technique in the US. Though these animations were rudimentary, 'Gertie the Dinosaur' in 1914 and 'Koko the Clown' in 1919 by Max Fleischer, considered as classics, stepped up the pace of animation films in silent movie era in USA.

The Beautiful Lukanida released in 1912 and conceived by the Russian-born director Wladyslaw Starewicz (later known as Ladislav Starevich) gets the honour of being the first puppet animation film. Neither this film, nor the first animated feature film -*El Apóstol*, made in 1917 by Quirino Cristiani from Argentina as well as his two other animated feature films, including 1931's *Peludopolis*, {the first to use synchronized sound}, have survived the present day. The silhouette-animated *Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926) directed by German Lotte Reiniger and French/Hungarian Berthold Bartosch is one of the earliest-surviving animated feature. This film used colour-tinted scenes, perhaps for the first time.

The list of other animated films during the silent era included the following films:

'Gertie the Dinosaur' made by Winsor McCay in 1914, 'The Sinking of the Lusitania' in 1918, 'Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend' in 1921 by John Randolph Bray who rediscovered some of McCay's techniques, 'The Dinosaur and the

'Missing Link' by Willis O'Brien in 1915, the first cartoon super star 'Felix the Cat' in 1919 and 'The Lost World', a stop motion marvel made in 1925. This was followed by the famous 'Aesop's Film Fables' during 1921-1929 created by Paul Terry, released by Van Beuren Studios.

Initially, Walt Disney also made silent cartoons like 'Laugh-o-Grams', 'Alice Comedies', 'Oswald the Lucky Rabbit' and 'Mickey Mouse'. Other significant silent era series were 'Heeza Liar', 'Mutt and Jeff', 'Krazy Kat', 'Bobby Bumps' etc.

The notable production houses during this period were: Barre Studio, Bray Productions, Barre-Bowers Studio {The Bray Studios was the first and foremost cartoon studio, housed in New York City-} Many budding cartoonists like Paul Terry of "Mighty Mouse" fame, Max Fleischer of "Betty Boop" fame, and Walter Lantz of "Woody Woodpecker" fame, all started their career in this studio. The cartoon studio was based in Circa during 1915-1928. 'Farmer Alfalfa' by Paul Terry and 'Bobby Bumps' by Earl Hurd were well known cartoons produced by the Bray studios. Fleischer Studios, set up by Max and Dave Fleischer created the Koko the Clown, Out of the Inkwell, and Sound Car-Tunes series. In addition, this era also saw distributors of animated films such as Margaret J. Winkler, Charles Mintz, Educational Pictures, Red Seal Pictures, and Bijou Films.

Although 1930s witnessed a few more animated feature films, Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs released in 1937 is deemed to be the first animated feature film with sound effects. It could be because Snow White became successful and well-known within the English-speaking world. The

first animation to use the full, three-color Technicolor method was *Flowers and Trees* (1932) made by Disney Studios which won an academy award for this work. We are all aware how Walt Disney dominated throughout the 1930s, through revolutionary cartoons 'Silly Symphonies', 'Mickey Mouse', and 'Donald Duck'.

The 1930s, termed as the Golden Era in USA animation also witnessed the emergence of big studios making animation films like Warner Bros, MGM and The Fleischer Studios with their creations like Betty Boop and Popeye cartoons.

Following the golden Age of American animation (1920s through 1950s), animation evolved at a more hectic pace during the television era i. e. 1950s through 1980s. During this period, the theatrical cartoons and feature films declined to some extent. Hanna-Barbara productions did dominate this phase with their TV animated series. Then we saw the emergence of morning cartoons on week ends, adult animation in the 70s, and a slew of commercial cartoons in the 1980s.

The present day animation (1980s onwards) boasts of mind boggling creations most of which are futuristic in concept such as 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', the 'Disney Renaissance' and Steven Spielberg's collaborations with Warner Bros like ET, Jurassic Park etc. The Simpsons is one of the most successful series that revived the adult-oriented animation. The other series of this genre is Cartoons Network's late night animation show 'Adult Swim'. Many studios all over the world have joined the bandwagon of making animation films for world wide distribution. The rise of CGI , increasing

popularity of Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and the Anime explosion which is mainstream version of Japanese animation represent the current scenario in animation.

HISTORY OF STOP -MOTION & CLAYMATION:

Stop motion and cel animation are two basic techniques in traditional animation. Stop motion animation, is used for many animation productions using physical objects rather than images of people, as with traditional animation. An object will be photographed, moved slightly, and then photographed again. When the pictures are played back in normal speed the object will appear to move by itself.

Clay animation is one the forms of stop-motion animation. It is the animation of clay models made preferably of plasticine clay. Producing stop-motion animation using clay /plasticine clay is a time consuming and labour intensive process. That is because, to produce a 30 minute stop motion animation movie using clay models, approximately 21, 600 times one has to stop to change the figures for the frames. In the case of feature-length films, in addition to clay, rubber silicone and resin-cast components are used to create models. The term Claymation is a registered trade mark in USA, registered by Will Vinton, the greatest pioneer in clay animation. Though foamation, meaning use of foam-rubber process, invented by Will Vinton has found a place in stop motion animation films, it is clay which is the preferred material to bring about aesthetic effect as well. A variant to claymation is the " clay melting" used in Will Vinton's film 'Closed Mondays'.

While there are several forms of clay animation, the notable few are:

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" Freeform" claymation represents a process wherein the shape of the clay changes significantly as the animation progresses, as exemplified in the films of Eliot Noyes Jr and Ivan Stang.

" Character" Clay animation maintains a recognisable character throughout the shot as in Art Clokey's and Will Vinton's works.

The " Strata -cut animation" entails long bread like loaf of clay packed with varying figures/ images, which is sliced into thin sheets with the camera taking a frame of the end of loaf for each cut as a result of which one could eventually see the movements of internal images within. This technique was pioneered by the German animator Oskar Fischinger during 1920s and 1930s subsequently upgraded by David Daniels in mid-90s as seen in his film Buzz Box.

Clay painting is termed as another form of claymation. This process requires clay to be placed on a flat surface and moved like wet oil paints. This technique results in a seamless merger of stop motion and traditional flat animation.

Early films using stop-motion were the classic Chicken Run and Wallace and Gromit, and later The Nightmare Before Christmas and James and the Giant Peach. Sometimes even objects are used, such as with the films of Jan Švankmajer.

Stop motion animation was also commonly used for special effects work in many live-action films, such as the 1933 version of King Kong and The 7th Voyage of Sinbad.

It was in 1920s, though eight years earlier Edison Manufacturing released a clay animated trick film called 'The Sculptor's Welsh Rarebit Dream', the clay animation films using either cels or the slash system became the dominant mode in animation film production. Although the cel method was preferred for cartoon films by the studios, clay animation was the medium in the well known film called 'Modelling' produced by Fleischer Studio in 1921. Joan Gratz, won academy nomination for her clay animation films Creation (1980) and won the Oscar for yet another film 'Mona Lisa descending a Stair Case' made in 1982. Craig Barlett, another Vinton animator was known for variation in clay animation used in his series of short films 'Arnold' in the mid 90s. Charles Bowers a comedian with great talent in animation made many bizarre films in the 1920s combining stop-motion animation and comedy.

Academy Award winning short films such as 'Closed Mondays' made by Will Vinton and Bob Gardiner in 1974, 'The Sand Castle'(1977) and 'Creature Comforts;' , produced by Aardman Studios in 1989 and all four Wallace & Gromit films created by Nick Park of Arrdman Animation and last but the least 'The Presentators' again filmed by Aardman Animation are typical claymation films.

Clay animation has been creatively employed in several computer games as well viz. The Neverhood, Clay Fighter, Patypus, Primal Rage. Besides TV commercials such as 'Chevron Cars', children's shows in the electronic media in the recent times are dominated by clay animation techniques which are often seen on Cartoon Network. Computer graphic image of clay animation is presented in a film called 'Flushed Away'.

COMPUTER -GENERATED IMAGERY {CGI }

What has caused a real revolution in animation industry is the Computer - generated imagery- abbreviated as CGI. It is significantly different from traditional animation because the drawings (known as 2D animation) in traditional animation gave way to 3D Modeling which is the virtual version of stop-motion. CGI combines these two forms of animation through computer aided animation but on 2D Computer drawing. CGI is as tedious as the traditional animation and many of the underlying principles of traditional animation are used albeit through computer aided software programmes.

Most of the characters employed in CGI films are based on animal characters, monsters, machines or cartoon-like humans. The latest trend is to create realistic-looking humans. The notable animation films of this genre are Films are 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within in 2001', 'Final Fantasy: Advent Children' in 2005, 'The Polar Express' in 2004, and 'Beowulf' in 2007. The constraint in this method of animation is to create the nuances and details of a living person if one has to make a realistic CG character; in particular, to synchronise the movement of the hair and clothing with the animated human character.

CEL-SHADED ANIMATION

Cel shading is a type of rendering, known as non photorealistic rendering, to make computer graphics appear to be hand-drawn. A recent development and a complex process, this is generally applied to mimic the style of a comic book or cartoon. The console video games use cel- shaded animation in addition to computer graphics. The material used in cel- shaded animation is the clear sheets of acetate , called cels. Some animators consider Cel -

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shaded animation as "2.5 D form of animation", a via media between 2D and 3D animation. It was only the console video games which shows the true real-time cel-shading as seen in Sega's Jet Set Radio launched in 2000 for their Dreamcast console. This style of animation was used in Freedom Project in 2006.

ANIMATION IN INDIA:

As in the western countries, the roots of animation in India are in Indian Cinema. In the early 20s, Dadasaheb Phalke, arguably one of the founders of Indian Cinema, {in whose name a prestigious award has been instituted to honour every year outstanding contribution in the field of cinema}, match sticks and a stop-motion camera to create a short film which was unfortunately not distributed for public viewing. After a lot of struggle, he succeeded in making a stop motion film 'The Growth of A Pea Plant' in 1912, marking the beginning of animation in films in India. However, the first animation film ever released in a theater was 'The Pea Brothers' produced by New Theatres Limited, and directed by Gunamoy Banerjee, and released on June 23, 1934. It took nearly seventeen years to produce the next animation film called 'Jumbo The Fox' coming from Ranjit Movietone and released in 1951. In the same year, another animation from New Theatres, 'Michke Potash', directed by Bhaktaram Mitra was released. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India set up a Cartoon Film Unit as part of its Films Division to promote animation films. This unit produced in 1956 'Radha and Krishna', a 22 minute film based on cel animation, directed by J. S. Bhowmagary. It is believed that camera movements over the miniature paintings of Indian art were employed to

create the animation. This film won prestigious awards in International Film Festival held in Berlin. Films Division had a team of animators like Kantilal Rathore, Pramod Pati, G. K. Godbole, and V. G. Samant, along with Ram Mohan, Bhimsain, Satam, Suresh Nayek. A film which impacted animation in India was 'Kalpana', made in 1948, directed by the legendary dance maestro Uday Shankar, although it was not an animation film. Because, the use of feet movement, film language with rhythm and melody skillfully synchronized appealed to all the film makers including Satyajit Ray & Mrinal Sen, doyens of Indian Cinema.