

**Visual-Style Variation as a Narrative Device  
in Animated Productions**

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## Abstract

“Animation’s ability to instantly dissolve the representational into the abstract, to leap associatively with ease, and to render simultaneously a flood of images, perceptions, and perspectives, makes it an unparalleled form of cinema” -- Tom McSorely, *Take One*, Summer 1997

The limitless potential of the animated medium has always been agreed upon. Its ability to deliver compelling ‘narrative material’ capable of expressing ‘emotive content’ has been thoroughly exploited. This investigation seeks to highlight a particular aspect of the medium’s potential within the spheres of the former - *‘the freedom and ability to use multiple visual styles within a single animated narrative’*. The aim of this investigation is to collectively study and categorize animated films that have used varied visual styles within the space of a narrative and then to assess the degree of effect upon it. In pursuit of this aim, a contextual study of visual-styles found in selected animated films was conducted, study of taking into account the existing form-based models of animation theorists with reference to a cognitive framework. This study coagulated in the formulation of a new model to classify animated narratives which have employed multiple visual styles as either a ‘stylistic system’ and/or as a ‘device for initiating symbolic impulse’. The result of this study indicates that the use of multiple styles within an animated narrative is most justified and effective when used as a device to entice audience participation.

## Introduction

Exploring the aspect of using multiple styles in animated narratives results from an obsessive personal desire to attain a level of cohesiveness, uniformity and visual integration within the graphic and temporal space of an animated production. I find the need to explore this obsessive art directorial stance by investigating an alternative approach (i.e. noncohesiveness, non uniformity and visual non-integration within the graphic and temporal space of an animated production) to ascertain its effectiveness and relationship to animated narratives. The core agenda of this research is to resolve how effectively techniques of varying ‘visual-style’ can be employed within an animated narrative production.

Animation by virtue of its form deals with the art of assembling independent narrative elements onto a stage and manipulating their movements to deliver a message to an audience. Such an assembly liberates an animator from replicating the orthodox construction of an ordinary world. In its stead, different narrative elements can bring with themselves different and distinct visual

characteristics that can aid in storytelling and audience cognition. However, in order to assess the impact that the use of techniques, such as *‘the variation of visual styles’* can have on the viewing experience, establishing a relationship between visual data and cognition becomes highly necessary. Existing form-based models that deal with the visual form in animation both within the broad context of motion picture and within the specific context of animation do not address such a relationship

The primary aim of this paper is to interrogate animated films that have used visual styles within the graphic and/or temporal space of a narrative and further attempt to assess their cognitive effect by devising a model that serves to fill the gap between form and cognition.

The process of investigation undertaken within this paper to answer its hypothesis included a preliminary contextual analysis of films and film sequences that have employed distinctly different styles. This was followed by citations of existing form based models; ‘LiveAction-Animation

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Continuum' and 'Animation Classification' by Maureen Furniss and Paul Wells respectively and the 'Cognitive Theories' of David Bordwell.

Maureen Furniss's liveaction-animation continuum is best described as a model that suggests mimesis and abstraction as opposing tendencies under which live action and animated imagery can be juxtaposed. Although Furniss confidently positions films on this model; albeit arbitrarily on the basis of form, such a model remains broad and seeks to encompass the entire infinite body of motion picture within it. Working on a more finite level, Paul Wells's 'Animation Classification' model deals specifically with the animated imagery by classifying it as orthodox, developmental and experimental animation. Upon combination of the two, the Wells model sits well ensconced within the Furniss model. However, collectively and independently both the form based models fail to draw a relationship between visual data and cognition. This relationship is established with the use of Bordwells theory of 'making meaning'. All the above theories were coagulated to form a new model that sought to accommodate the films discussed within the scope of this paper.

1.



fig1; Disney "Lion King" 1994  
fig2; Disney "Lilo and Stitch" 2002

2.



### Background

Art direction within animated film production has been one of my prime areas of interest. In this role, I have persistently and quite obsessively prioritised an aesthetic integration of narrative visual elements<sup>1</sup> that comprise the animated mis-en-scene<sup>2</sup>. It distracts me a great deal to watch the likes of the conventional Disney cartoon that draws my attention exclusively to the distinct difference in visual style between characters and background by virtue of the way they are rendered.(fig) Characters are drawn comparatively flat while backgrounds are richly rendered in watercolour - illustrating depth, space, light and shade, and other atmospheric effects with artistic flare<sup>3</sup>. This disparateness was exactly

what I wished to avoid in my own productions. I preferred an animated film to be one style or another, but nonetheless exhibit visual consistency and integration.

Although, such concern for style, look and integration may seem petty and finicky to an audience who are perhaps oblivious to 'onscreen image aesthetics' and more concerned with the details of a narrative, it is by no means an agenda. Other artists and production houses too have made references and expressed their concern in one way or another about achieving integration in visual aspects of an animated film. For instance, in a

<sup>1</sup> Narrative visual elements, refers to the elements that comprise the graphic and narrative space of a story setting the stage for an event or a sequence of events.

<sup>2</sup> Mise-en-scene, originally in French means "putting into scene". It is used to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame such as setting, lighting, costume and the behavior of the figure. In this paper, explicit reference is made to the setting aspect of mise-en-scene with regards to animation.

<sup>3</sup> Characters were drawn on transparent cells and painted with acrylic. Owing to the opaque nature of acrylic, the resulting painted characters looks flat, when compared to the watercolor illustrated backgrounds which had more details owing to its translucent nature.



.3

fig 3, fig4; Sylvain Chomet "Les Triplettes de Belleville" 2004 - notice the consistency of the dark outline in background and foreground elements of the mise-en-scene



.4

detailed interview with the makers of 'Les Triplettes de Belleville', Director Sylvain Chomet, stated his preference of using hybrid animation techniques out of technical necessity, but also emphasizes his concern for achieving a certain sense of overall cohesiveness in the films visual aesthetics. Pietr Van Houte – 3D compositor in charge on the film adds to this by briefly explaining the technique he employed to attain such a cohesiveness, he says;

*"We spent a lot of time replicating the hand-drawn style of a line, though we never managed to get a perfect copy of Evgeni Tomov, the designer's, shaky style! [...] I'd take a line from a paper sketch and integrate it into the rendering of a 3D object. I'd alter the contour until the 2D and the 3D versions were indistinguishable."*<sup>4</sup> (AnimeVision)

This clearly exhibits the extent of effort invested by artists to cater to the concern of delivering an animated narrative as a stylistically integrated cohesive product. The French production house Folimage (fig5,fig6) and Estonian animator Priit Parn (fig7), also have taken such a stance and have voiced their opinions about an integrated style in Jayne Pillings's book *2D and Beyond*.

*"Folimage's commercial productions have always been distinguished by their insistence on using [...] a graphic style – for both characters and background – that is unlike conventional cartoon animation. Such distinctiveness led to the cinema release in France and Belgium for L'Enfant au Grelot, unusually for a half hour TV programme."*<sup>5</sup> (Pilling, 2001: 141)

<sup>4</sup> Les Triplettes de Belleville - An Interview With The Filmmakers <http://www.jcmediaworks.com/av/feature4/article.php>

<sup>5</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Folimage – The Auterist Studio, pg 141



.5

fig5; Folimage "L'Enfant au Grelot"  
fig6; Folimage "L'Egoiste"



.6



fig7; Priit Parn 'Breakfast on the Grass'  
Both character and background share similar line qualities

fig(8,9); still from my minor project film 'Dirtbuster 3000'; Attempts were made to apply a watercolor filter on the sketchy lines of the character to blend them in to the environment, but the lines stayed clearly visible



8.



9.

*"Parn dislikes the classical Disney convention of using a different style background to that of the action, feeling that the same techniques should be used for both of them"*<sup>6</sup>

(Pilling, 2001: 112)

My minor production 'Dirtbuster 3000' had been a stepping-stone towards achieving a visually integrated animated piece. Having constructed the watercolor backgrounds of the narrative first, I proceeded to bestow my characters with the same soft and watery feel that was characteristic to the background. Time took its toll and in order to meet the deadline, the characters had to be rendered along with their visible construction lines in Photoshop, a digital image software program. In a moment of self-reflection, I realized that while I was in a pursuit of visual integration, practical reasons had forced me to design a piece that was in fact a mishmash of sketchy characters and watercolor backgrounds (fig8,9). – a look that I initially wanted to stay away from.

Narrative success and an integrated cohesive look were the two hurdles that I attempted to overcome again with my next film 'Gifted'. Whilst, the narrative progressed on its own independent course, I attempted experiments in Photoshop cloning and documenting my steps along the way. The use of masks and textures had allowed me to maintain a consistency with the various background illustrations that appear in each shot during the course of the film. However, when it came down to the business of character rendering, the time required to render the image a single image to a level that would yield a 'homogenous look' to the production stood at a staggering 6 minutes per frame. I found myself again limited by time and since the production schedule did not allow me the luxury of spending the ideal six minutes to render one frame, I established a two-step production process:

1. Apply a preliminary look to the entire film - a look that was logically acceptable to the narrative.
2. Apply a polished final look to the film that was more aesthetically in tune to my design sensibility.



10.



11.



12.

fig 10,11,12; Screenshots from my major animated film project 'Gifted' - notice the comparatively high level of detail and shading in fig10 and 12, when compared the flatness of the character in fig 11. The highly level of finish is primarily because of less drawings involved in the sequence.

Unfortunately due to lack of time, it was not always possible to complete step two of the process for every shot to get the final 'look' I desired, resulting in an inconsistency between narrative elements and sequences. Sequences that appeared on screen for lesser duration or comprised of fewer drawings exhibited a higher level of detail than others that appeared for a longer duration or had more drawings (fig10,11,12). It is at this point, however that I questioned myself as to what, if anything, does such an obsession for visual integration add to a narrative other than presenting itself as a sequence of well-designed images. I found myself curious to investigate the antithesis of my previous stance on art direction i.e. to explore and investigate if a visual incongruity could be embedded into the narrative and used as a device to propel a story.

As an art form, animation is considerably different from live- action and I realize that it might seem almost superfluous at times to mimic the visual aesthetics of conventional live action cinema in a world that embraces temporal, spatial, artistic and abstractive freedom in constructing a narrative. However, as I approach this research from an alternative direction, it becomes increasingly important to address what other critics and experts in the field have to say about a visual integration and cohesiveness. In Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud addresses the issue of disparateness of characters and background in animated narratives by stating;

*"One set of lines to see. Another set of lines to be."*<sup>7</sup> (McCloud, 1993: 43)

He attempts to justify the stylistic difference between flat drawn characters and realistic backgrounds by explaining that – the representation of an entity in a simple linear style, not only makes it easier to spot the 'object of attention' on screen but also increases the importance of the message delivered by it as a result enhancing the degree of its identification with the audience. He further emphasizes his theory by justifying the realism of the painted backgrounds, by stating;

*"...no one expects audiences to identify with brick walls or landscapes and indeed, backgrounds tend to be more realistic."*<sup>8</sup> (McCloud, 1993: 42)

Although, there seems to be a sense of visual practicality in this theory, I fail to be totally convinced by it. My argument to his visual theory would simply be – what would one say about live action films in which the characters and the background are as real as one another? The audience of a live action film does not seem to identify more or less with a character or a background on the basis of its simplicity or realism. I personally believe from my own production experience, that the lack of visual integration in many animated productions is a result of budgetary and time constraints acting upon a production. These constraints necessitate the practical use of combining different techniques and styles to bring a production to completion.

My curiosity about exploring visual incongruity in animated narratives by no means undermines my aesthetic preference for visual stylistic integration but through a critical investigation of an

<sup>6</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Parn, Priit – Engineering Narrative, pg 112

<sup>7</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 43.

<sup>8</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 42.

alternative approach to storytelling and establishing relationships between visual style, variation and its resulting effect posed on a narrative and audience, I hope to challenge and better understand my own practice.

**Definitions:**

Every film develops specific techniques in patterned ways, which can be called *style*. The *formal system* that includes content, whether it be a narrative, abstract, documentary, all interact with a *stylistic system* comprising of techniques such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound (fig13). Further emphasizing this relationship, David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson in their book, *Film Art- an Introduction*, states;

*In a narrative film, techniques can function to advance the cause-effect chain, create parallels, manipulate story-plot relations, or sustain the narration's flow of information [...] film style may become separate from narrative or non-narrative form, attracting our attention in its own right.*  
(Bordwell and Thompson, 2003: 175)

This paper seeks to add one more patterned technique to the list that is specific to animation - 'visual-style variation'. This report will refer to the term 'visual-style variation' as the process/technique of using more than one visual style in a production, resulting in a degree of difference between 'narrative visual elements' either from a former state, from others of the same type, or from a

standard. Such a variation most popularly appears in two possible modes;

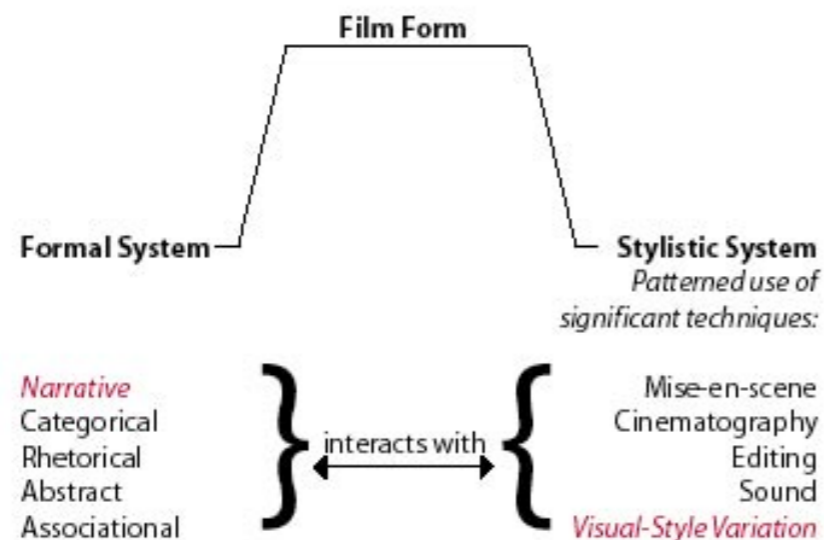
- Spatially** – between narrative elements within the graphic space of a single shot
- Temporally** – between shots over the span of a scene and/or between scenes over the span of a narrative.

- Such a variation or difference in style of shots/ scenes/characters may be resultant of changes in;
- colors schemes** identified by monochrome and color
  - technique** identified by cutouts, puppet animation, cell animation, live-action, pixilation, hand-drawn; etc
  - render mode** identified by three dimensional, two dimensional, super deformed; etc
  - linear quality** identified by hatching, cross hatching, calligraphic; etc
  - level of realism/simplicity**

Since three-dimensional animation is concerned with the materiality of elements, this research will also refer to 'variation in materials' of three-dimensional animation in the same light as 'variation in style' of two-dimensional animation.

However, an important point of distinction needs to be made at this point in the paper is that '*visual-style variation*' is a proposed technique in its own right and is considered a subset of the stylistic system. It should not be mistaken as a technique of varying between existing visual stylistic systems such as cinematography, mise-en-scene and editing.

fig 13; David Bordwell and Kristin Thompsons diagram explaining the interaction between the formal system and stylistic system of film.



**Design**

*'...animation is a medium which makes available a multiplicity of styles and approaches in telling of a story or the expression of particular thoughts and emotions. Such is the nature of animation, a high degree of preparation is necessary to make even the shortest film.'*<sup>9</sup> (Wells, 1998: 68)

The availability of multiplicity of styles; more specifically 'visual styles'<sup>10</sup> is a characteristic that is inherently demonstrated by an animated narrative rather than a live action narrative. However, the question of where such a technique of 'visual-style variation' has been used and what it can contribute to the narrative and viewing experience is the core agenda of this paper. Where can films that use such a system of visual-style variation be located within the specific art form of animated filmmaking? And more broadly within the art form of motion film making?

The following case studies use varying degrees of multiple styles, and have been chosen as a means to discuss the context in which such stylistic variation has been employed.

**Case studies and Analysis**

**Style variation in context of externalizing internal states of mind / penetration**

**Dumbo's Pink Elephant Parade Sequence, Disney (1941)**

In this particular sequence within the film *Dumbo*, both Timothy, the brash circus mouse and Dumbo inadvertently get drunk on a bucketful of champagne. Timothy challenges Dumbo to blow an enormous bubble and upon doing so, the shimmering pink bubble turns into a cartoon elephant and several minutes of the most wonderfully surreal insanity follow, as the pink pachyderms merrily grow, shrink, multiply, divide, metamorphose and change color.

**Analysis**

The fluid motion and constantly shifting imagery of this sequence are depicted in an entirely different aesthetic look when compared to the rest of the film. The disparateness of this sequence, "Pink Elephants on Parade" is justified in the context that we the viewers are invited into Dumbo's semi-conscious state of mind and are given a glimpse of the surrealist state of drunkenness that Dumbo has entered (fig14). The style variation in this case is primarily temporal as the film returns to its Disney-



fig14; Disney 'Dumbo' 1941 - 'Pink Elephants on Parade' sequence

fig15; Disney 'Dumbo' 1941 - the 'morning after' when Dumbo and Timothy awake to find themselves on a tree.



In the pink elephant sequence, pachyderms are drawn in outlines and constantly changing colors and patterns. This contrasts heavily with the consistency of visual style in the rest of the film where there is a sense of depth and space.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, P (1998), *Understanding Animation, Once Upon A Time – Narrative Strategies*, pg 68.

<sup>10</sup> The way an on screen element looks, this may be considered in relation to color, materiality, line quality, form.

esque style in the morning after when both Dumbo and Timothy mouse awake to find themselves on the branch of a tree. (fig15)

The sequence serves as an interesting and much needed interlude between the 'Getting Drunk' and the 'Learning to Fly' sequences as it establishes the premise for querying how Dumbo might have ended up on the branch of a tree in the morning. Although the same effect may technically have been attained by a fade to and from black, it is highly possible that the surprise factor may have diminished greatly had it not been interwoven with such a 'tripout sequence' that punctuates this turning point in the film with a playful interruption.

**His and Her Circumstance, Hideaki Ano (1998)**

His and Her Circumstance (Kareshi Kanojo No Jijou) is an anime series created by Hideaki Ano, Masami Tsuda and Gainax. Based on a manga series, the ongoing story revolves around relationships between a group of high school girls and boys. The central characters of the story are Miyazawa Yukino and Arima Soichiro who are essentially bitter-sweet rivals.

**Analysis**

The series is a classic example of an animated film that visually manifests the internal dialogue and feelings of characters by employing both spatial and temporal variation in style. The artwork and music change depending on the thoughts of the character - when something seems particularly dramatic, the character and/or situation is drawn in a distinctly different style resulting in the animation to follow on in chibi<sup>11</sup>. However, if something seems particularly serious, the characters may be shown more realistic or even sketched out in line art. The animation style in each scene represents when a character knows they are doing something ridiculous or embarrassing or stressful and adds to the greater self-awareness of himself/herself. For



fig (16-18); Hideaki Ano "His and Her Circumstance" 1998 - Yukino in different expressive moods, characterized by varying levels of caricature or realism

fig19; a classic example of shift to black and white sketch mode in between sequences.

<sup>11</sup> Chibi(CB):Japanese for "small," "little," or "young." A "chibi" style drawing of an Anime character usually depicts them as being baby-like, with smaller, chubbier bodies, larger eyes and head, and shorter arms and legs. Chibi characters are usually made to be extremely cute and endearing, and it's not uncommon for even villainous characters to be drawn as such. CB is an acronym for Child Body, and is a prefix indicating a chibi style. Artists draw their characters like this from time to time as a sort of "self-parody.- <http://animeyume.com/animedictionary.html>

example, when Yukino thinks she's done something particularly stupid, we hear her inner dialog about how she is completely stressed that she made a fool of herself and the animation at this point follows the drama of her inner dialog and may resort to black and white pencil drawings, it may be overly exaggerated or the entire scene may turn out to be fairly realistic looking.

In Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud briefly touches on this issue of using hybrid styles (mix of simplicity and realism) in context to Japanese comics and animation, by saying that

*"...while most characters were designed simply to assist in reader-identification – other characters were drawn more realistically in order to objectify them, emphasizing their "otherness" from the reader."<sup>12</sup> (McCloud, 1993:44)*

This would theoretically justify the disparities that are characteristic of Japanese animated films such as His and Her Circumstance. Depending on the style and level of realism and detail, the filmmaker is able to distance the reader 'away from' and 'close to' the characters as and how he sees appropriate to advance the story. However, it is worth mentioning that over the years, such narrative use of visual disparity has so well engrained itself within the anime and manga culture of Japan, that they only risk to appear jarring and discontinuous to a Non-Japanese audience who may not be familiar with such an established and practiced convention of story telling.

**Waking Life Richard Linklater (1998)**

The film Waking Life takes on a documentary approach in which, the protagonist Wiley Wiggins serves as a kind of floating human consciousness engaging himself in arbitrary conversations with street gurus, scientists, philosophers and other entities in pursuit of finding a way to wakeup and exit the surrealistic dream world he seems to be trapped within.

<sup>12</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 44.

<sup>13</sup> "Wired" [Unreal World](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.02/wakinglife.html) <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.02/wakinglife.html>>



fig(20-22); Richard Linklater 'Waking Life' 1998 - temporal variation of styles between scenes.

**Analysis**

Waking Life is an interesting example that quintessentially exhibits a very complex combination of both the temporal and spatial facets of style variation within the context of depicting a dream world.

*"Each actor was drawn, or "interpreted," by a different artist, intentionally lending every character a distinctive style - the antithesis of what goes on at animation houses like Disney, where the goal is seamless cohesion."<sup>13</sup> (Wired - Unreal World)*

The lack of cohesion and inconsistency of styles lends itself aptly to its content i.e. the depiction of a dreamlike world. Random vignettes and shape shifting characters both enforce the dream like content of the film and contributes to a complex mix of style variation.

For instance, two characters engaged in a conversation, are subjected to a significant change in their colour scheme, level of detail and line qualities. The change of style from an initial simple multi-coloured image to a complex and detailed duotone image is justified by the fact that they both enter a frame of mind in which they perceive each other as god (fig23,24). One convict, filmed behind bars, burns red with anger and animated characters glow with the pastel softness of a leisurely, thoughtful morning (fig20,22). The look and feel of these shots are not only distinctly different from each other but are also embedded into the narrative, hence finding a way to propel the story.

### Style variation in context of musicality

#### Yellow submarine King Features (1968)

'Yellow Submarine' can be considered one of the most avant-garde and prototypical animated rock videos of the 1960's. Its plot includes the invasion of the country of Pepperland by the enemies of joy and color, followed by the establishment of a grim dictatorship of Blue Meanies, which the Beatles overturn with their love songs, after an adventurous journey.

#### Analysis

*The film, apart from story and plot, was designed as an "experience". Feature film audiences want this "sensation" or "experience". "Since the film was made of drawings and paintings, we decided to bring in all the images familiar to the popular mind that we could...."*<sup>14</sup>  
(Bendazzi, 1994:281)

Yellow Submarine varies styles and techniques both spatially and temporally to create an eclectic and brightly colored mishmash of drawn animation, cutouts, rotoscoping, photo collage and processed live action (fig25,26,27). The character designs themselves are heavily based on Art Nouveau and Surrealism, resulting in a series of bizarre characters that reflect a disregard for reality. Apart from the resultant varied styles emerging from the use of



fig 23,24; Richard Linklater 'Waking Life' 1998 - temporal variation of styles between scenes.

fig(25-27); George Dunning 'Yellow Submarine' 1968



<sup>14</sup> Bendazzi, G. Cartoons "One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation", pg 281

different techniques, there are sharp contrasts between muted color schemes of 'Liverpool and the occupied Pepperland' on one hand and the garish psychedelic colors of 'the sea monsters' on the other.

The extremely stylized animation serves two purposes – firstly, as a magical stream of consciousness that is quite apparent and more importantly as a statement against the dominance of Disney's use of cute, rounded characters and realistic three-dimensional space.

#### Beauty and the Beast – Ballroom Sequence Disney (1991)

In this particular sequence, the Beast and Belle waltz to the title song 'Beauty and the Beast'. The sequence is a hybrid of hand drawn characters dancing within a CGI rendered ballroom.

#### Analysis

The blend of CGI environment and traditional animated characters in this sequence is almost close to flawless and considerably unnoticeable on first viewing. However, gradually it becomes apparent that the 3d ballroom environment is always in focus to the flat colored characters – an aspect that stands out in relation to the depth of field established in the watercolor backgrounds in the rest of the film (fig28,29). Keeping in mind the musical nature of the sequence that sets it apart from the rest of the film, such variation in style; albeit subtle, does not do much to add or take away from the narrative other than marking a turning point in the narrative.

*"Because the directors wanted to set this key moment apart emotionally, they deliberately chose a visual style distinct from the hand painted backgrounds in the rest of the film"*<sup>15</sup>  
(Solomon, 1994: 312)

The use of multiple styles is well justified by the above stated apparent deliberation, however it does little to hide the fact that creating a three dimensional ballroom enabled the directors to employ sophisticated cinematography that rivaled the best live action films. The grand moving camera shot continually cork-screws through space, re-

<sup>15</sup> Solomon, C. Enchanted Drawings – The Captains and the Kings Depart, 1960-1994; pg312



fig(28-29); Disney 'Beauty and the Beast' 1991 - stills from the Ballroom sequence of



composing the frame representing the heady swirl of being in love.

The subtle variation in style may just have been a result of technical necessity rather than a genuine aesthetic choice – a factor that is common to many animated productions primarily arising out of budgetary and time constraints.

#### Style variation employed out of technical necessity, budgetary concerns and practicality

#### Titan A.E 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox (2002)

'TITAN A.E', an animated feature length film by directors Don Bluth and Gary Goldman is based in the year 3028 – a time when Earth has been destroyed by an alien race who mercilessly pursue genocide on humans. The only hope for humanity is a giant spaceship called Titan, which is lost in deep space. The young son of the Titan's captain, Cale possesses hidden information about its location and with a select few, he sets off on a quest to recover it and bring back hope and a home to the human race.



fig 30; Don Bluth, 'TITAN A.E.' 2002 -distinctly different-styled alien characters by virtue of CGI



fig 31; Don Bluth, 'TITAN A.E.' 2002 - traditionally drawn characters on cel-shaded 3D environment



fig 32; Don Bluth, 'TITAN A.E.' 2002 - cel-shaded 3D space suit with traditionally drawn character, Cale inside.



fig 33; Don Bluth, 'TITAN A.E.' 2002 - entirely CG sequence; notice the roundedness of these objects and the lack of outlines when compared to the cel animated and cel shaded characters in the previous images.

### Analysis

This film is an ambitious attempt to fuse traditional animated techniques with the latest in computer graphics, resulting in a rather spatial stylistic variation. While the traditional aspects of the film are quite conventional and the CGI is cutting edge, the inherent problem that lies at the heart of the film is the fact that the two styles don't merge together. Addressing this fact, both the directors in their DVD commentary state;

*"Notice that on the screen, we have a very realistic kind of environment – a lot of that is achieved through 3D animation and then you have the very cartoon-like characters – even the little boy.... looks too cartoon-like when compared to the environment. And we could have gone more realistically if we had more money and time ... to put in more shadows or design them so that they were more like the anime style – a little more real."*<sup>16</sup>  
(Director's Commentary DVD)

From the above it can be implied that although the problem of integration is not unsolvable, a non-integrated look by default becomes the outcome of monetary and budgetary constraints. From a practical point of view, TITAN A.E is a film that heavily invests its story on the dynamics of explosion and 3D objects which practically necessitates the use of CGI. It can be argued however, that in the case of such a film, a variation in style does not seem too jarring and out of place within the context of an unfathomable futuristic world of aliens and spaceships.

It is worth mentioning at this point that this is the very same rationale that applies to the difference in style between environment and characters in traditional productions – an earlier mentioned concern that forms the basis of this paper.

### Style variation in context to signifying space / location

#### Osmosis Jones, Warner Bros (2001)

'Osmosis Jones' is an animated feature length film by directors Peter and Bobby Farrelly. The film is based inside the body of Frank where lives an entire city consisting of the body parts that essentially makes Frank work. A white blood cell cop named Osmosis Jones teams up with a cold tablet Drix to destroy the mysterious, evil virus that has invaded the City of Frank, while in the outside world, a doctor persistently tries to figure out what the problem is with Frank.

### Analysis

Films such as Osmosis Jones use multiple styles in more ways than one. However its primary use is within the broad context of locating parts of the narrative inside and outside a cosmos. The cosmos in this case is the body of Frank. This film exhibits a clearly distinct use of temporal style variation - shifting into animation mode when inside of Frank (fig35,36) and shifting to live action when depicting the external functions and interactions that Frank has with the world around him (fig34). Both internal and external spaces of the cosmos contain their own narratives that affect one another through a series of causal connections. In a few short sequences, there exists a spatial style variation of live-action, CGI and traditional animation in the same shot when the animated character Osmosis Jones, finds himself outside the host body of Frank (fig37). Additionally, there exists a subtle variation in the two character designs, which is indicative of their personalities.

*"The producers believed that different animation technology helped separate the two lead characters. Traditional animation was used for the fluid good guy, Osmosis Jones, while the rigid personality of Drix, the Robo-Cop type character was easier to achieve in CGI"*<sup>17</sup> (Digital Media World Magazine - The Devil Inside)



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fig34; Peter and Bobby Farrelly 'Osmosis Jones' 2001 - live action sequence

fig35; cel animated sequence

fig36; traditionally animated Osmosis Jones and 3D animated Drix

fig37; hybrid sequence of CGI and traditional animation. one of the few sequences when the two characters find themselves outside the body of Frank.



.37

The resultant look and movements of the characters was befitting to their personalities, and functions (fig36) hence, the use of different animation techniques was well justified to enhance the narrative and graphic space of Osmosis Jones.

<sup>16</sup> TITAN A.E Directors Commentary, Dir. Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, DVD, 2001

<sup>17</sup> The Devil Inside," Digital Media World Magazine, Issue 38, (August 2002) ,pg 14.

**T.R.A.N.S.I.T**  
**Piet Kroon (1996)**

'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' is an animated short film directed by Piet Kroon. It is the story of a woman, Emmy, who gets tragically intertwined in a love triangle with two men, Oscar and Felix. The story is set in the late 1920s and takes place in seven locations - Venice, the Orient Express, Amsterdam, Cairo, Baden, St. Tropez, and on board an ocean liner to the Americas.

Analysis  
 In Jayne Pillings book *Animation and Beyond*, Piet Kroon describes T.R.A.N.S.I.T's core concept as

*'to use different graphic styles to give the element of style or design dramatic meaning'*<sup>18</sup>  
 (Pilling, 2001:88)

T.R.A.N.S.I.T contextualizes the use of multiple styles by setting its story in seven different geographical locations fig(38-41). Each of these locations/segments has its self-contained story that contributes to a larger narrative. The segments are not only characterized by the signature art styles of different animators but also by different palettes that evoke different moods, providing a kind of visual barometer of the emotional ups and downs of Emmy's life. Apart from this abstraction, the narrative is told in reverse - where the viewer is introduced to the idea of the lives of all three characters being destroyed, and then told the cause of the destruction. This gives rise to further abstraction in the narrative flow. The style variation in this film is temporal and changes from one segment to another.

**Style variation in context of depicting the presence of the artist**

**Manipulation**  
**Tandem Films (1991)**

'Manipulation' by Daniel Greaves, is not unlike many early animations that follows the tradition of self-referentiality, where the artists live-action hand is a key actor along with the animated



Piet Kroon 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' 1996  
 fig38; still from Oceanliner Sequence  
 fig39; still from St Tropez Sequence  
 fig40; still from Baden Sequence  
 fig41; still from Egypt Sequence

fig42; Daniel Greaves's 'Manipulation' 1991



42.

character. In this work, the animator's hand is constantly involved in intimidating and altering a two-dimensional animated character that desperately tries to free himself from the grasps of his manipulative creator. Amidst the battle that ensues between the two, the character subsequently assumes three-dimensional form before finally ending up as a flat image again.

**Analysis**

*'I admire animators who understand and respect the materials they use, making a statement about the materiality, such as oil paint in Clive Walley's work, or the tactility of the clay in Svankmajer's Dimensions of Dialogue.'*<sup>19</sup>  
 (Pilling, 2001:120)

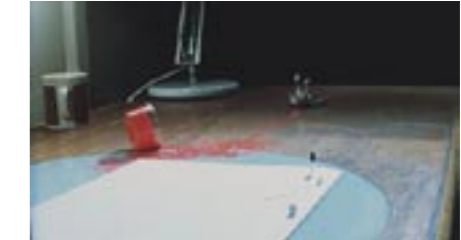
This film, and others made by Greaves clearly exhibit such a 'statement about materiality' and confirms his conscious artistic preference for embedding such concerns by using a variation in visual style and material in the narratives he produces. He harmoniously and effectively blends these into the same screen space using a variety of techniques namely live-action, cutout, hand-drawn and 3d puppet animation (fig42-44). Such work may simply be comprehended as a piece that exhibits the potential of animation, which one can either dismiss as a comical and instructional performance or may choose to interpret as a political statement highlighting oppression. Whatever the case may be, the narrative arguably invites interpretation that is open ended.

On that note, it also becomes increasingly important to mention other films such as 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit?' by Robert Zemeckis, which push the boundaries of visual-style variation in the context of a full-fledged feature length production combining cartoonal interaction with live action. The acting attempts to meet classical Warner Bros style cartoon action half way in terms of exaggerated gestures and cartoon-like double takes. In both these films, although there exists a well-bound narrative on the surface, each involuntarily invites interrogation and upon doing so yields symptomatic meanings<sup>20</sup> that are otherwise disguised.



.43

fig43,44; Daniel Greaves's 'Manipulation' 1991 - the character assumes 3D-form momentarily.



.44

**Style variation used in the context of establishing associative relations**

**Hotel E**  
**Priit Parn (1991)**

'Hotel E' by Priit Parn, is an animated film that explores the concept of glasnost by the portrayal of two distinctly different hotel rooms – one monochrome and the other brightly coloured.

**Analysis**

On the surface, it would appear that this film uses style variation to signify two different locations, but upon further investigation it becomes more apparent that the styles and techniques that Parn chooses to depict the east and the west is a little more than just signifiers of location but more so a signifier of a mental state of society – a governmental state. The film represents East in monochrome and distinguishes it with the colorful representation of the West underscoring the message that 'while the East represses art and language, the West for all its freedom lacks art and language, and with that – individuality'

<sup>18</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Kroon, Piet – Processing the Creative Thought, pg 88

<sup>19</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Greaves, Daniel – Exploring Different Techniques, pg 120

<sup>20</sup> Symptomatic meanings or repressed meanings are meanings that the work divulges "involuntarily"

The film is a bitter critique of the hypocrisy of both the East and the West in which Parn very skillfully juxtaposes not only the difference in color schemes but also the resultant look and feel of the animation techniques to further enhance the narrative message. The minimal movements within sequences depicting the West is characterized by the use of slow and precise motion, characteristic of rotoscope techniques (fig48), while the East is presented with the use of dirty-dark colors, frantic, chaotic and totally out of control motion animated by way of cel technique (fig47). The message of the film is essentially a painting of painful portraits of the predicaments and contradictions that are inherent to every society. It highlights the fact that while the oppression of the East is clearly obvious, the West has done a better job in manufacturing emptiness and oppression into something warm and inviting. The film also includes central shots, such as that of a round table/clock where a number of officials sit around in a circle following a meaningless routine, under the on-going scrutiny of an observer. In this film, not only can the color scheme be seen as a stereotypical exterior manifestation of the interior governmental state of the country, but can also be perceived as a visual manifestation of the interior mental state of the characters resulting from oppression.

Parn also uses a similar approach in his film *'Some Exercises for an Independent Life'* that contrasts between a grey, methodical adult and a playful creative boy, hence exhibiting his conscious use of such techniques for 'making meaning'.

**Daddy's Little Bit of Dresden china**  
**Karen Watson (1987)**

Daddy's Little Bit of Dresden China by Karen Watson is a film that addresses the idea of child abuse.

**Analysis**

This film implicitly and explicitly addresses issues of child abuse with a variety of animation techniques ranging from drawn animation, collage, puppet/model animation. Aside from the visual style resulting from the use of these various techniques, Watson also uses her puppet figures symbolically by varying the materials that they are made from. For instance, while the father figure in the film is



Prit Parn's *'Hotel E'* fig(45-47), suggests a model of a society with strict rules, i.e. East. fig48; The West seen rich in colour.

constructed out of metal with glass and a razor blades for a mouth, the daughter is a figure made from feathers and bandages with a china vase for a head. The mother on the other hand is made up of dried flowers and has a wooden spoon for an arm. Each of these characters is designed with materials that require reading and interpretation. The repulsive and dangerous materials that make up the father is clearly suggestive of his violence, while the fragility of the daughter is apparent from the feathers and band-aid. Watson also employs two dimensional flat figure animations in a symbolic attempt to reveal the hypocritical attitudes of society.

This film clearly uses a spatial variation with regards to materiality and a temporal variation with regards to style and technique – in favor of delivering a narrative and engaging an audience on a level that requires firstly, the associative linking of materials to symbolism and secondly, the linking of symbolism to narrative.

**Preserving Wax**  
**Monica Syrette (2000)**

'Preserving Wax' by Monica Syrette made at the Animation and Interactive Media Center at RMIT University, Melbourne is yet another animated film, that puts materials to symbolic use. In this film, a similar approach is adopted by varying the materiality of characters – a character made out of wood dominates another made out of wax causing the latter to desperately seek freedom by melting itself (fig49,50). This film explores variation in materiality on a more spatial level than the previously mentioned Karen Watson film.

In the films studied above, it is clear that a 'variation in style' (graphic style/materials) can and has aided narratives in more ways than one. While some films have used this variation' as a stylistic system, others have used it to initiate a symbolic impulse in viewers to initiate their participation and engagement.

The next agenda of this paper is to investigate the degree to which such a technique can engage an audience's cognition. In the following sections, I will cite form-based models and cognitive theories by animation historians and film theorists respectively, that will allow me to construct a personal model and investigate the possibility of drawing a relationship between 'visual-style variation' and 'cognition'.

**Form Study**

Animation theorists Maureen Furniss and Paul Wells, have in part touched on the issue concerning narratives with multiple styles within their independent models. The following includes a brief study of their form-based models.

**Maureen Furniss's LiveAction - Animation Continuum:**

In *Art in Motion – Animation Aesthetics*, Maureen Furniss, establishes a live action – animation continuum (fig51), by placing mimesis<sup>21</sup> and



Fig (49,50) Monica Syrette's *'Preserving Wax'* 2000 above - a confrontation between the two distinctly designed characters below - character made out of wax



abstraction as opposing tendencies of the motion picture production spectrum. She locates a documentary like *Sleep (directed by Andy Warhol, 1963)*<sup>22</sup>, which records a real-time account of a person sleeping as a mimesis. However, a film such as *Circles (directed by Oskar Fischinger, 1933)*<sup>23</sup> which is composed of circular images animated to the film's score is considered 'abstraction' Towards the centre of this spectrum, lies films such as 'The Three Caballeros'<sup>24</sup> that skillfully combine live-action and animation.

<sup>21</sup> Mimesis is defined as the imitation of life or nature in the techniques and subject matter of art and literature.  
<sup>22</sup> Sleep is a movie by Andy Warhol that shows the poet John Giorno sleeping for eight hours in his bed. It has been said that the film was a product of Warhol's obsession with boredom.  
<sup>23</sup> Circles (Kreise) is a film by Oskar Fischinger that shows radiating triumphant surging circles. The film exists in two parts, one synchronized to "Venusberg" music by Tannhauser, the second to "Hildigung's March" by Grieg. Visually, the film inflicts a hypnotic effect that is the result of different sized circles on a flat surface.  
<sup>24</sup> The Three Caballeros is a Disney film that is the first example of an animated film that blends liveaction and animation. See Appendix for a brief synopsis of this film.



Fig51; Maureen Furniss's LiveAction - Animation Continuum

### Paul Wells Theory of Classification

Paul Wells's theory of classification, further investigates and sub categorizes a section of the above stated Maureen Furniss spectrum into orthodox, developmental and experimental animation (fig52). By a process of logical deduction<sup>25</sup>, its possible to single out 'developmental animation' as the category that would include animated narratives employing multiple styles (fig53), thus:

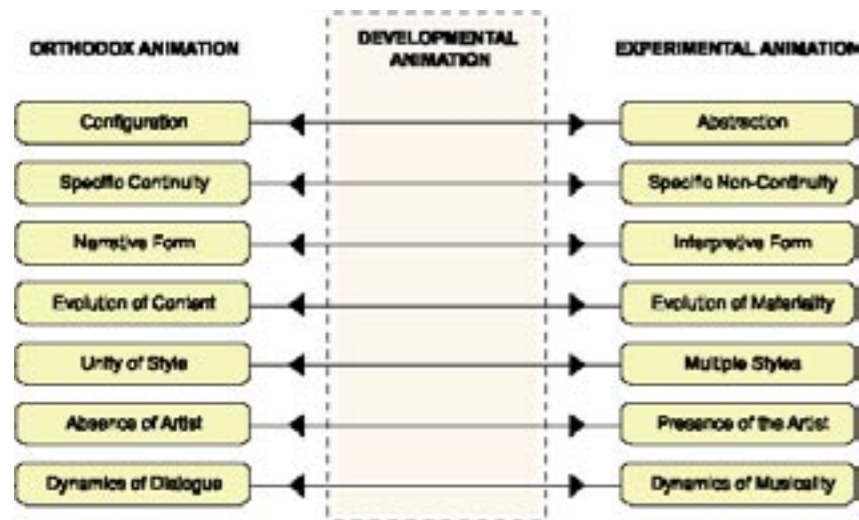


Fig52; Paul Wells's Model of Animation Classification

In this model, Paul Wells suggests that anything that falls between orthodox and experimental by combination of the established characteristics of the two can be considered developmental animation

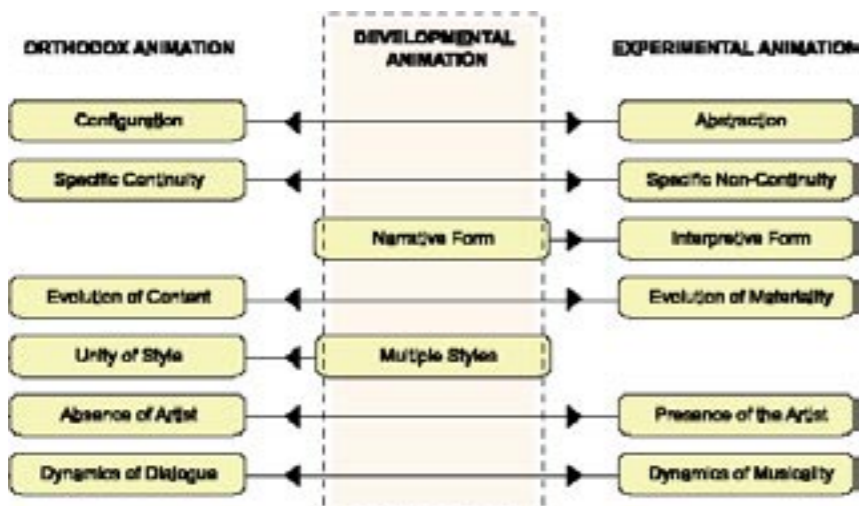


Fig53; Logical Deduction from Paul Wells Model

In this model, i have attempted to form one of many basic structures of a developmental film by drawing out 'narrative form' and 'multiple styles' from orthodox and experimental animation respectively.

<sup>25</sup> See appendix for a detailed explanation of the logical deduction process from Paul Wells's model.

### Cognition Study

In watching a film, the perceiver identifies certain cues, which prompt them to execute inferential activities such as comprehension and interpretation. David Bordwell, in *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, argues that when we make sense of films, we construct meanings in only four possible ways<sup>26</sup> – referential meaning, explicit meaning, implicit meaning and symptomatic meaning. In his book *Making Meaning*, he states;

*"[c]omprehension is concerned with apparent, manifest, or direct meanings, while interpretation is concerned with revealing hidden, non-obvious meanings"*  
(Bordwell, 1989:24)

Therefore, the first two modes of making meaning (i.e referential and explicit, also collectively known as 'literal meanings') are covered by the activity of comprehension, whereas the later two (i.e. implicit and symptomatic meanings) are covered by the activity of interpretation. Whereas comprehension can be a combination of both low order perceptual processes and high-order cognitive activities<sup>27</sup>, interpretation is always concerned with high-order perceptual processes<sup>28</sup>. He claims that his approach of developing these four categories however is heuristic and therefore not substantive by any means. The focus of his study primarily lies in the area of interpretation and the cycle of meanings it can generate. He persistently highlights that the existence of symbols and metaphors all depends on the rationale of the critic's argument.<sup>29</sup>

### Results

#### Combined Model and Focus Area of Discussion

The combination of the Maureen Furniss and Paul Wells models yields a new model that seeks to accommodate the films discussed in this paper (fig54). However, one of the drawbacks of Maureen Furniss model is the disregard for live action narratives, such as *Godfather* and computer-generated narratives such as *Final Fantasy*.

its placement between a special effects laden film- *Jurassic park* and a mimetic film- *Sleep*, on the basis of the fact that it uses the special effect of animation in the entire film to mimic the natural form. The placements of these films on the model however are subjective and sensitive to their form. As Bendazzi points out,

*"In its most realistic version, animation expands to 'live action cinema'; in its own abstract forms animation expands into kinetic art."*<sup>30</sup>  
(Bendazzi, 1994:16)

Perhaps the reason for this exclusion is that the model was published in 1998 - a time when a movie like *Final Fantasy* was still in the making. I have introduced these films into the model and justified

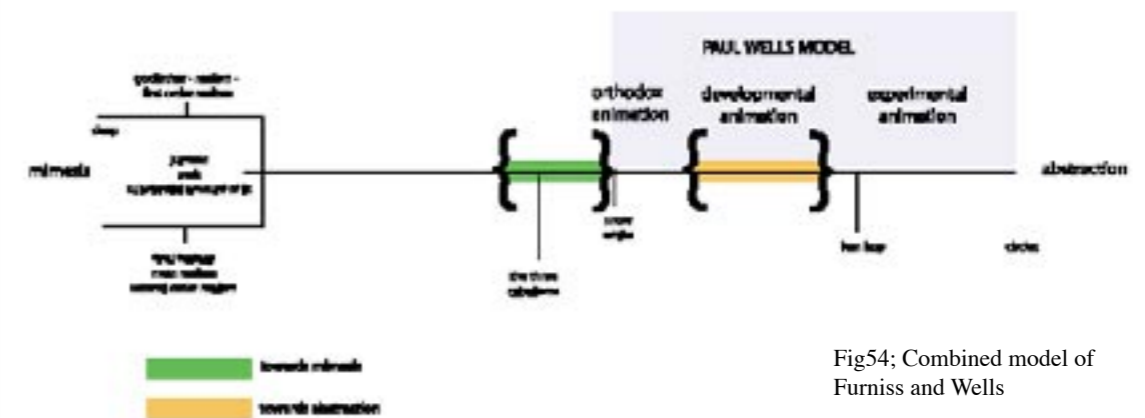


Fig54; Combined model of Furniss and Wells

<sup>26</sup> see appendix for detailed explanation of David Bordwell's 'Four Ways of Making Meaning'

<sup>27</sup> high-order cognitive activities refers to processes such as computation of data, memory retrieval, and problem solving.

<sup>28</sup> low order perceptual processes refers to the attention to, and recognition of, actual information from the environment.

<sup>29</sup> see appendix for Bordwells example of 'making meaning' discourse

The two categories that seek to accommodate the films discussed in this paper are:

- Towards Mimesis
- Towards Abstraction

### Towards Mimesis

Narratives that come under this category are characterized by their visually apparent hybrid nature that combines a highly representational form (such as live action) and a comparatively abstract form (such as animation). In most cases, these are films that have extensively used live action modes in conjunction with varying degrees of animation – resulting in an overall form that tends to be in part mimetic (as a result of live-action) and in part abstract (as a result of animation). This mix is none-the-less an example of multiple styles in a production and is therefore valid to the topic discussed in the paper.

### Towards Abstraction (Developmental Animation)

Maureen Furniss's live action-animation continuum places a traditionally animated film such as Snow-White towards the centre of the spectrum - indicating that the animated form tends to be abstract in comparison to the live action form (which is popularly considered to be 'real' or more mimetic). Hence, in a combined model of both Furniss and Wells, it becomes increasingly evident that the study and classification of animation in general, tends to be within a gray area of abstraction. Further emphasizing this point, Paul Wells in his book Understanding Animation, states

*"...animation works best as an abstract form, where it fully demonstrates its intrinsic capability of moving non-representational lines and material which fall outside the orthodox domains of 'realist' constructions and agendas. Animation of this sort may be recognized as more specifically bound up with the desire to express profoundly personal, sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, aspects of human thought, feeling and experience. The liberating freedom of the medium has a direct*

*correlation with the variety of work achieved by certain animators and artists, who are not merely seeking to find the most appropriate means by which they express their vision, but to progress the medium itself."*  
(Wells, 1998: 28-29)

In essence 'developmental animation' would be the category that challenges the above mentioned 'orthodox domains of realist constructions and agendas' and hence assumes the other section of the combined spectrum that accommodates narratives using multiple styles/visual-style variation.

### Drawing a relationship between Visual Form and Cognition

Because the existing models of Furniss and Wells are unable to address the effects of visual data on film comprehension, I will attempt to draw this relationship between the combined model (fig55) and Bordwell's theory of 'making meaning'.

Both the Furniss and Wells models are based entirely on form. The extreme mimetic/orthodox form on one end is more concerned with the delivery of direct meanings to its audience by the direct representation/imitation of life or nature, whereas the extreme abstract/experimental form on the other end is more concerned with revealing hidden meanings, the cognitive activities of which have already been categorized as comprehension and interpretation, respectively.

Thus, depending on the way style variation has been used in a film, the perceiver is required to draw on comprehension and/or interpretation to make a meaning of a film. For instance, if a film has used the technique of 'visual-style variation' as a stylistic system - then it usually calls upon comprehension as the use of the technique is contextualized within the environment of the film. However, if a film has attracted attention to the use of 'visual-style variation' as a narrative tool - it most likely calls upon higher order cognitive activity like interpretation, as the viewer is now expected to participate, solve a problem and look for cues within the space of the narrative.

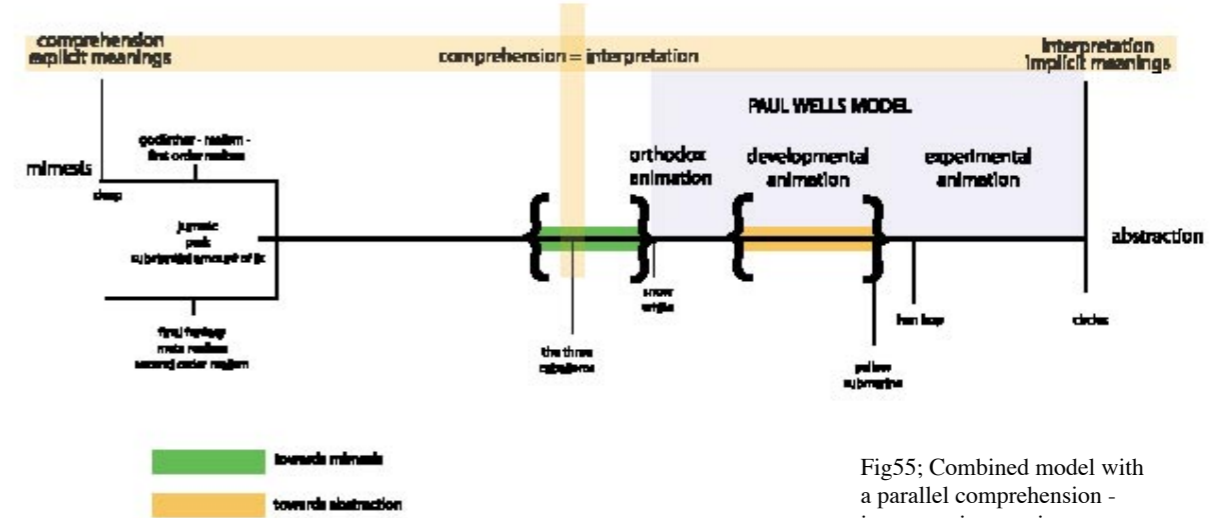


Fig55; Combined model with a parallel comprehension - interpretation continuum

A mimetic film such as the direct-cinema documentary <sup>31</sup>'Sleep', references meanings that the viewer extracts from the text and can be considered 'literal meanings'. However, an abstract/experimental film such as 'Circles', covers 'implicit and/or symptomatic meanings' that the viewer derives from asking questions, examining themes, or speculating the intentions of the author.

Hence, based on the above, it would not be erroneous to observe that along both the Furniss and Wells models (both independently and combined) that transits from mimesis and orthodox to abstraction and experimental respectively, there is also a parallel comprehension – interpretation continuum (fig54). For instance, a film such as Three Caballeros (center of the Furniss model), requires an equal degree of comprehension and interpretation because it's a hybrid film that uses both live action and animation. Snow White, in spite of its highly representational rotoscoped characters, is abstract compared to Three Caballeros, primarily because it is constructed and presented as a cel-animation therefore demanding a higher degree of interpretation – an interpretation that is concerned with the revelation of characters and landscapes as caricatures, or abstractions of reality.

The drawback of such a combined model however, is that it becomes limited in accommodating films, as it seeks to isolate only animated films between Snow White and Circles, and further claims that

all animations require more interpretation than live action films, which is not always entirely true and is hence open to argument.

### Placing 'Case Study' Films on the Combined Model

Films that have employed style variation minimally such as 'Dumbo' and 'Beauty and the Beast', etc will not be placed on this continuum because their stylistic varied sequences are relatively ephemeral and hence will be excluded from further study.

Waking Life would locate itself towards mimesis, as it is more akin to a hybrid of live action and animation. The process involved in the construction of the film does not sit entirely with the definition of an animation and hence can be claimed to be a production that is quasi live-action in terms of movement and quasi animation in terms of onscreen look<sup>32</sup>. On the basis of form therefore, its position on the combined model becomes questionable. Further doubt arises when forums such as those at the Sundance Film Festival, comment about Waking life by elaborating it as

*"...a showcase for an animation style that is unprecedentedly artful. They use computers to paint reality, not mimic it."*  
(Wired - Unreal World)

<sup>30</sup> Bendazzi, G, *Cartoons: 100 Years of Cartoon Animation* (London: John Libbey, 1994)

<sup>31</sup> Direct cinema documentary, I mean to refer to documentaries that characteristically records an ongoing event as it happens, with minimal interference by the filmmaker. Such documentaries are also known as cinema-verite.

<sup>32</sup> See appendix for 'Discussion of Waking life as an Animated Production'

Such elaboration places a film such as *Waking Life* in a gray area between abstraction and mimesis. 'His and Her Circumstance' clearly exhibits a tendency *towards abstraction* when analyzed within the Wells model. It can be appropriated as a *developmental animation* based on the fact that it employs a range of styles in the delivery of its narrative. Despite the high degree of style variation, the film still remains close to being orthodox when viewed in light of the fact that it is predominantly a cel-animated film

When studied from a cognitive point of view, 'His and Her Circumstance' and 'Waking Life' are both equally informed by continuous dialogue but the former remains a caricatured animation (abstraction of reality) and depends largely on recalling established conventions<sup>33</sup> within Japanese animated film-making, hence requiring more interpretation than 'Waking Life', which follows a informed documentary approach in establishing a narrative. It prioritizes comprehension and offers explicit meaning that the audience can perceive from the information on screen at the time.

'Waking Life' can be well placed directly between 'The Three Caballeros' and 'Snow White' by virtue of the fact that it is a film that refrains from

the orthodoxy of cel-animation and uses a rotoscope technique to paint reality.

'His and Her Circumstance' can be well placed between 'Snow White' and 'Hen Hop' by virtue of the fact it is well ensconced within the spheres of developmental animation. However, it would appear closer to Snow White.

'Osmosis Jones' can be well placed directly between 'Waking Life' and 'Snow White' by virtue of the fact the mix of the liveaction form and the animated form is more visually apparent than the subtle mix of animation techniques and styles (CGI and traditional). Even though the film is predominantly a hybrid-animated production of CGI and cel-animation thereby earning the right to call itself a developmental animation – placing it 'towards abstraction', it is arguable that the mix of live action and cel animation in the film also earns it the right to be placed 'towards mimesis'. Its placement however, raises considerable quandary regarding the cognitive activities involved - it can be said that the films predominantly animated (hence abstracted) form invites marginally more interpretation than 'Waking Life'. However the level of comprehension and interpretation in comparison to Snow White remains questionable.

'Titan A.E' can be well placed along with 'The Three Caballeros' by virtue of the fact it has an equal tendency towards abstraction and mimesis. The CGI and three dimensional animation in this film can be considered a form of realism, more specifically second order realism<sup>34</sup> which is at par with live action - resulting in a hybrid form that is not too different from the likes of 'The Three Caballeros', thereby demanding equal degrees of comprehension and interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

'The Yellow Submarine' can be well placed between 'Snow White' and 'Hen Hop' by virtue of the fact it exists on the verge of being an experimental piece (when interrogated by the Wells model) primarily because of its extreme variation in style and seemingly non-existent narrative. However, it is by merit of the same thin plot line and narrative that it is retained within *developmental animation (towards abstraction)*. The film positions itself closer to 'HenHop' in the continuum, as it is clearly a film that was designed as an experience and centers on evoking audience sensation and interpretation.

'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' can be well placed exactly between 'His and Her Circumstance' and 'Yellow Submarine' by virtue of the fact that it is a perfect example of a *developmental animation* (when interrogated by the Wells model). Although 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' uses a range of multiple styles, it exhibits a stronger continuous narrative that does not open itself to the level of interpretation that 'Yellow Submarine' demands from its viewer. However, the lack of dialogue, the dynamics of musicality and the reversed storytelling structure in 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' demands a higher level of interpretation and problem solving than the informative and consistent dialogue based series 'His and Her Circumstance'.

'Manipulation' can be well placed between 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' and 'Yellow Submarine' by virtue of the fact that it uses a live-action environment as a stage for stop motion and therefore its performance based narrative and its mixed media characteristics places it well within the scope of *developmental animation (towards abstraction)*. There is no doubt to the existence of the argument that the use of live action character i.e. the hand of the animator could potentially be a factor that can locate the film *towards mimesis*. Such a dispute can only be settled by a cognitive comparison, which suggests that while some audiences may read this film on the surface and assign explicit meanings to the film, others may construct and assign symptomatic meanings. In the case of the latter, a higher cognitive activity such as 'interpretation' comes at play. Further emphasizing its placement on the model, it can be reasoned that although 'Manipulation' may seem to have a rigid straightforward narrative structure than 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T', the dynamics of musicality and the existence of a possible disguised meaning invites reasonably more interpretation than the latter.

'Hotel E', 'Daddy's Little Bit of Dresden China' and 'Preserving Wax' can be collectively well placed between 'T.R.A.N.S.I.T' and 'Yellow Submarine' along with 'Manipulation' by virtue of the fact that firstly, they can all be called developmental animation and secondly, they are invested with implicit meanings that are meant to 'speak indirectly' to the viewer by initiating his/her 'symbolic impulse'. For instance, In a film like Hotel E, this symbolic impulse may be triggered in the viewer when the juxtaposition of the two distinctly different hotel rooms, repeated appearance of a central image, alteration of the color scheme or when differences in animation techniques, are noticed. Whatever be the case, these films invite a high degree of narrative interpretation by the construction of covert, symbolic or implicit meanings.

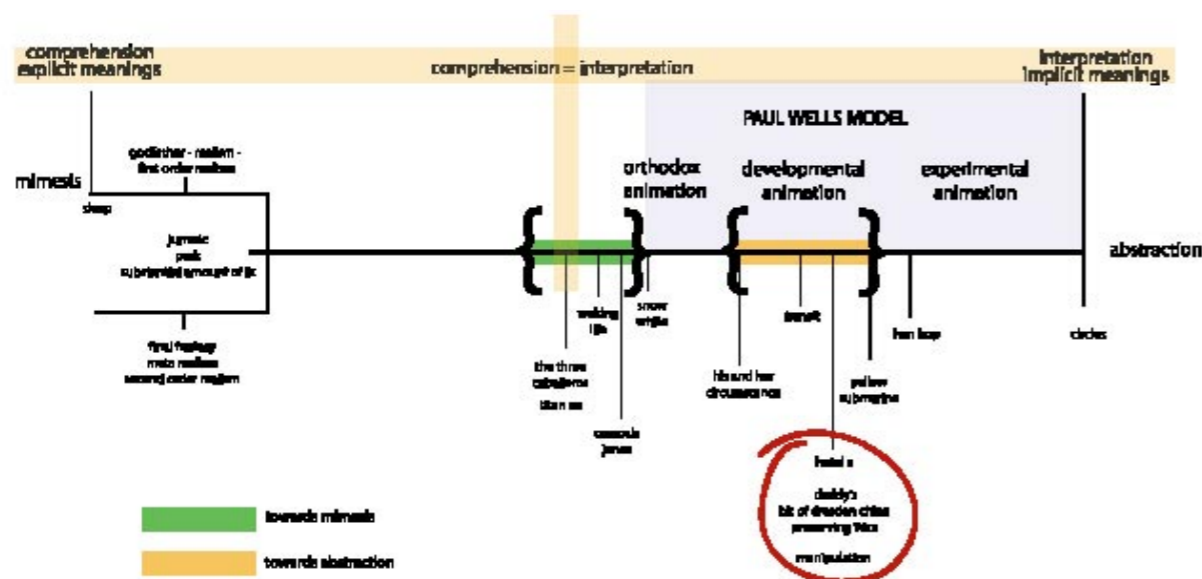


Fig56; Case Study placed on Combined Model

<sup>33</sup> The established conventions refer to the perceived normality of manga and anime distortions that has more or less become a stylistic system of the Japanese animation vocabulary.

<sup>34</sup> See appendix for extract from Andy Darley's paper on 'Second Order realism and post-modernist aesthetics in computer animation'

<sup>35</sup> For the purpose of this research, I will ignore the fact that the film may have suffered from lack of funds or time and consider the film on the merit of its visually apparent form and embrace the distinct styles as an inherent feature of the film

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

Revisiting the combined model, and acknowledging the placement of the films discussed in this paper, it can be concluded that animated films have broadly used the technique of 'visual-style variation' either as a *stylistic system* or as a *narrative tool* (characterized by the use of symbolism).

As a *Stylistic System*, the use of visual-style variation within the medium of filmmaking is not too different from the use of other patterned techniques such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound. These techniques interact with the formal system of film making to advance the cause and effect chain of events, create parallels, manipulate story, fill gaps, highlight a scene, set apart a mood or simply sustain the flow of a narrative. For instance, the use of varying style in context to externalizing internal states of the mind may not be deemed too different from the cinematographic use of vignettes in romantic sequences of soap operas, or the sepia tone of flashback sequences. The meanings that a viewer extracts from such *systematic* use of visual-style variation are usually explicit and therefore 'speaks directly'.

As a *Narrative Tool*, visual-style variation has been used effectively by animated productions to initiate a 'symbolic impulse' amongst viewers and provide them with cues to interrogate meanings that a film may offer beneath the surface. These meanings as we have seen can either speak to the spectator indirectly, or may be disguised and open to varied individual interpretation. On the combined model, these are also the same films that are placed well between orthodox and experimental animation (fig56), hence indicating a genre that is involved not only with advancing a narrative but is also highly engaged in redefining the medium of animation itself.

Animation possesses the capacity to create new modes of storytelling, often rejecting the notion of a plot with a beginning middle and an end in favor of symbolic or metaphoric effects. It is the use of style variation on this 'symbolic level' that I believe has the most effect or contributes greatly to a narrative because not only does this make the animated narrative intriguing but also justifies its delivery in an animated form. Style variation used within this context is probably most engaging as it invites a high degree of audience participation and interpretation. Symbols, metaphors and other such methods of establishing associative relations are principally based on models of allusion and suggestion. At times these are clearly apparent while at other times are obfuscated, hence requiring a higher degree of engagement and study to bring together unconnected images to a logical and informed point where a relationship can be drawn. These films are usually engaged in using style and its variation as a 'cue' for the spectator to construct implicit meanings. However, if the cues serving the delivery of such symbols are too repressed, then they risk becoming too abstract and hence verge on becoming experimental. On this note, William Moritz states;

*The true abstraction and the true symbol must have an intriguing spirit and integrity of its own, and it must suggest more meanings, various, almost contradictory depths and speculations beyond the surface value; otherwise why bother to obfuscate? If the viewer comes to the point of saying, 'Oh, that represents the police and that represents freedom,' then that revelation is about as interesting as, 'Gee, Donald Duck drives a car and mows his lawn just like an average American; he must represent the average irascible American!'*  
(Moritz, 1988:29)

Filmmaking and all its *systems* at the most basic level add to the subjectivity already inherent to the medium. In animation, this subjectivity is more apparent. One of the most basic contributions of style variation as I see it is 'enhanced subjectivity' i.e. by the use of multiple styles, the animator/filmmaker takes a greater degree of control over the graphic space in addition to the narrative space, and by doing so highlights his presence.

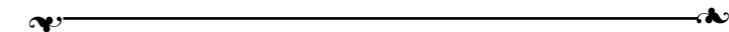
In my film 'Gifted', I doubt very much whether I could have used style variation as a *stylistic system* but there was definitely an opportunity to use it as a *narrative tool*. At the end of this study, I believe that the finished

film 'Gifted' in a sense had a symptomatic meaning where the message was far too repressed than I had intended. The film had in my opinion failed to deliver the cues to viewers, which would have motivated them to question my original intention, causing many to read the film on the surface as a humorous account of a handicapped boy interacting with his toys. This is where the use of style as a *narrative tool* could have come in handy.

One of the considerations in pre-production had been to pursue the idea of producing 'Gifted' as a stop motion animation. I believe this would have offered me with much greater opportunity to vary materials, thereby allowing me to highlight the alien material and artificial nature of the boy's prosthetic leg and his mechanical toys, from his own organic form.

From my original obsessive stance in the role of Art Director on my films, to integrate all visual elements into an aesthetic whole, through this study I have come to a better understanding of how I might actually use style variation as symbolic and narrative devices to communicate my messages more effectively. Depending on the nature of the narrative, I still wish to continue and pursuing visual-stylistic integration, but henceforth will also attempt to use the potential inherent within the language of visual style.

On a personal artistic level, I realize that my obsession for integration focused exclusively on the visual aesthetics of the animated artform, whereas this research and its outcome focuses on the consequence of the same. This knowledge now permits me to consciously explore and attempt methods to progress the narrative form and the medium of animation on a unique and individualistic level.



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## EndNotes

Narrative visual elements, refers to the elements that comprise the graphic and narrative space of a story setting the stage for an event or a sequence of events.

<sup>2</sup> Mise-en-scene, originally in French means “putting into scene”. It is used to signify the director’s control over what appears in the film frame such as setting, lighting, costume and the behavior of the figure. In this paper, explicit reference is made to the setting aspect of mise-en-scene with regards to animation.

<sup>3</sup> Characters were drawn on transparent cells and painted with acrylic. Owing to the opaque nature of acrylic, the resulting painted characters looks flat, when compared to the watercolor illustrated backgrounds which had more details owing to its translucent nature.

<sup>4</sup> “Anime Vision.” Les Triplettes de Belleville - An Interview With The Filmmakers  
<<http://www.jcmediaworks.com/av/feature4/article.php>>

<sup>5</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Folimage – The Auterist Studio, pg 141

<sup>6</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Parn, Priit – Engineering Narrative, pg 112

<sup>7</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 43.

<sup>8</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 42.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, P (1998), Understanding Animation, Once Upon A Time – Narrative Strategies, pg 68.

<sup>10</sup> The way an on screen element looks, this may be considered in relation to color, materiality, line quality, form.

<sup>11</sup>Chibi(CB):Japanese for "small," "little," or "young." A "chibi" style drawing of an Anime character usually depicts them as being baby-like, with smaller, chubbier bodies, larger eyes and head, and shorter arms and legs. Chibi characters are usually made to be extremely cute and endearing, and it's not uncommon for even villainous characters to be drawn as such. CB is an acronym for Child Body, and is a prefix indicating a chibi style. Artists draw their characters like this from time to time as a sort of "self-parody."

- <http://animeyume.com/animedictionary.html>

<sup>12</sup> McCloud, Scott. (1993) Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art, Chapter Two – The Vocabulary of Comics, pg 44.

<sup>13</sup>”Wired” Unreal World “ <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.02/wakinglife.html>>

<sup>14</sup> Bendazzi, G. Cartoons “One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation”, pg 281

<sup>15</sup> Solomon, C. Enchanted Drawings – The Captains and the Kings Depart, 1960-1994; pg312

<sup>16</sup> TITAN A.E Directors Commentary, Dir. Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, DVD, 2001

<sup>17</sup> Digital Media World Magazine, issue 38, (August 2002) – Article – The Devil Inside, pg 14.

<sup>18</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Kroon, Piet – Processing the Creative Thought, pg 88

<sup>19</sup> Pilling, J. (2001) From the series Animation: 2D and Beyond, Greaves, Daniel – Exploring Different Techniques, pg 120

<sup>20</sup> Symptomatic meanings or repressed meanings are meanings that the work divulges “involuntarily”

<sup>21</sup> Mimesis is defined as the imitation of life or nature in the techniques and subject matter of art and literature.

<sup>22</sup> *Sleep* is a movie by Andy Warhol that shows the poet John Giorno sleeping for eight hours in his bed. It has been said that the film was a product of Warhols obsession with boredom.

<sup>23</sup>Circles (Kreise) is a film by Oskar Fischinger that shows radiating triumphant surging circles. The film exists in two parts, one synchronized to "Venusberg" music by Tannhauser, the second to "Hildigung's March" by Grieg. Visually, the film inflicts a hypnotic effect that is the result of different sized circles on a flat surface.

<sup>24</sup> The Three Caballeros is a Disney film that is the first example of an animated film that blends liveaction and animation. **See Appendix** for *Brief synopsis of this film*.

<sup>25</sup> **See Appendix** for *Explanation of the logical deduction process from Paul Wells’s model*.

<sup>26</sup> **See Appendix** for *Explanation of David Bordwell’s ‘Four Ways of Making Meaning’*

<sup>27</sup> *high-order cognitive activites* refers to processes such as computation of data, memory retrieval, and problem solving.

<sup>28</sup> *low order perceptual processes* refers to the attention to, and recognition of, actual information from the environment.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix for Bordwells example of ‘making meaning’ discourse

<sup>30</sup> Bendazzi, G. Cartoons “One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation”, pg 16

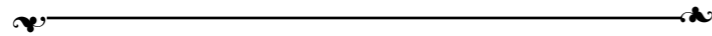
<sup>31</sup> Direct cinema documentary, I mean to refer to documentaries that characteristically records an ongoing event as it happens, with minimal interference by the filmmaker. Such documentaries are also known as *cinema-verite*.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix for ‘Discussion of Waking life as an Animated Production’

<sup>33</sup> The established conventions refer to the perceived normality of manga and anime distortions that has more or less become a *stylistic system* of the Japanese animation vocabulary.

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix for extract from Andy Darley’s paper on ‘Second Order realism and post-modernist aesthetics in computer animation’

<sup>35</sup> For the purpose of this research, I will ignore the fact that the film may have suffered from lack of funds or time and consider the film on the merit of its visually apparent form and embrace the distinct styles as an inherent feature of the film



## Appendix

### 24. Brief Synopsis of *The Three Caballeros*

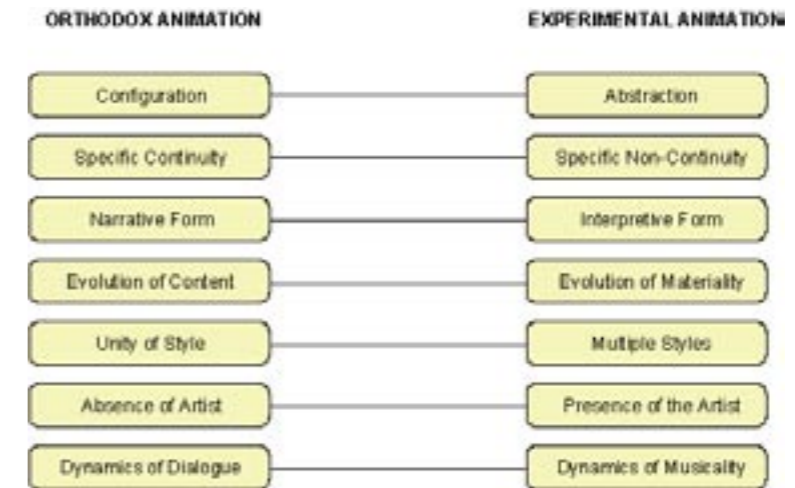
“*Melody Time* or *Make Mine Music*, but after two short, enjoyable segments, it abandons its diversions and shifts its focus to the wraparound story, in which Donald Duck receives a birthday present on Friday the 13th and begins a hallucinatory tour of Latin and South America. The film flirts at first with being a fanciful travelogue of the region by incorporating some suspect live-action location shooting and a few cursory looks at the customs of the countries in question, but it generally abandons that idea and most pretenses of plot to present a stylized version of the land below the border that seems to exist mostly to offer opportunities for hedonistic revelry and sexual abandon. Of course that release is presented in Disneyfied terms, but once the film begins its headlong launch into that abstract fantasia of color and sound, it’s difficult to deny the sexual nature of its characters’ pelvic thrusts and rampant phallic imagery. Clearly, this is Disney’s horniest animated feature.

It’s no mistake that all of the female characters in the film are portrayed by live actresses, but even though they are flesh and blood, they’re less emotionally developed than the cartoons that chase after them. They exist only as erotic spectacle, and even though there’s naturally no nudity, there is plenty of focus on the female form. In this libidinous context, Donald Duck’s slowly escalating frustrations can only be viewed as sexual ones. Despite frequently popping his top in nearly every other Disney cartoon he appears in, here he really only flips out once, after being forcibly removed from a beach populated entirely by scantily clad, eager to please women. For the remainder of *Caballeros*’ running time, he’s wide-eyed and drunk on the showcase before him, often getting so caught up in the moment that flashes of gender confusion crop up. Because the opening two segments feature Donald as he watches short stories that unfold on film, he becomes a surrogate for the viewer by the time his odyssey begins. His figurative orgasms flash up on screen in the form of fireworks and musical crescendos, and as such his peaks of excitement match the audience’s. Due to that attuned attention to the audience experience, *Caballeros*’ highly conceptualized flights of fancy don’t feel like animated onanism. The animation and sexual content are so closely alloyed that the visceral joy each element causes becomes indistinguishable from the other.”

MovieMartyr, *The Three Caballeros* <<http://www.moviemartyr.com/1945/threecaballeros.html>>

### 25. Explanation of the logical deduction process from Paul Wells’s model.

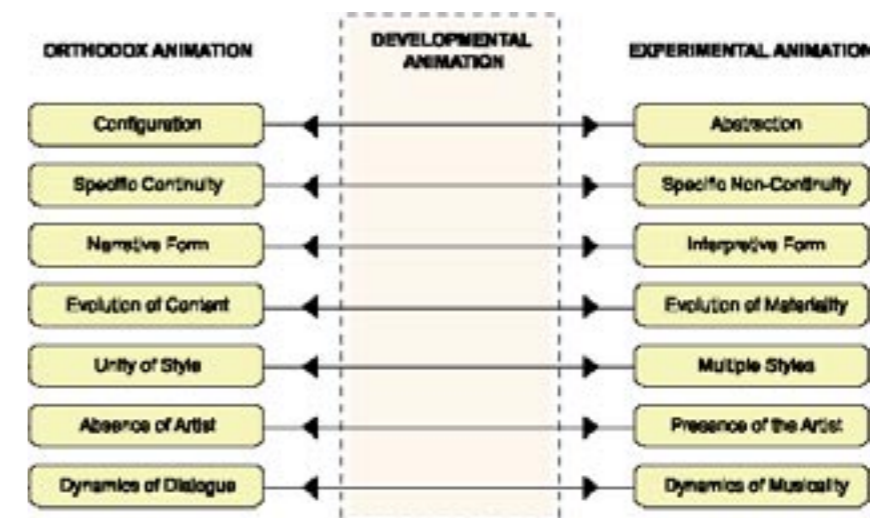
Paul Wells elaborately classifies animation by virtue of form into orthodox, developmental and experimental animation. He studies both ends of this spectrum by placing orthodox animation on one end and experimental on the other. He critiques them on the basis of configuration, continuity, form, content, style, artist presence and dynamics. The table below illustrates this spectrum clearly.



On the basis of the above study, it becomes clear that to Paul Wells - orthodox animation refers to nothing more than the orthodoxy established over the years by mass produced ‘cell’ animation. It is in fact a collective term he uses to describe the highly industrialised cel animation that has come to overshadow other forms of animation. These animated films are characterised by the use of figures, an existence of stylistic unity, dialogue and a logical story-like continuity that prioritises content resulting in a narrative form told without emphasizing the presence of the artist.

On the other hand, experimental animation is contrary to orthodox animation and hence is characterised by abstraction that either redefines the body or resists its depiction, an existence of multiple styles, music and an illogical, irrational discontinuity that prioritises materiality resulting in an interpretative form underlining the presence of the artist.

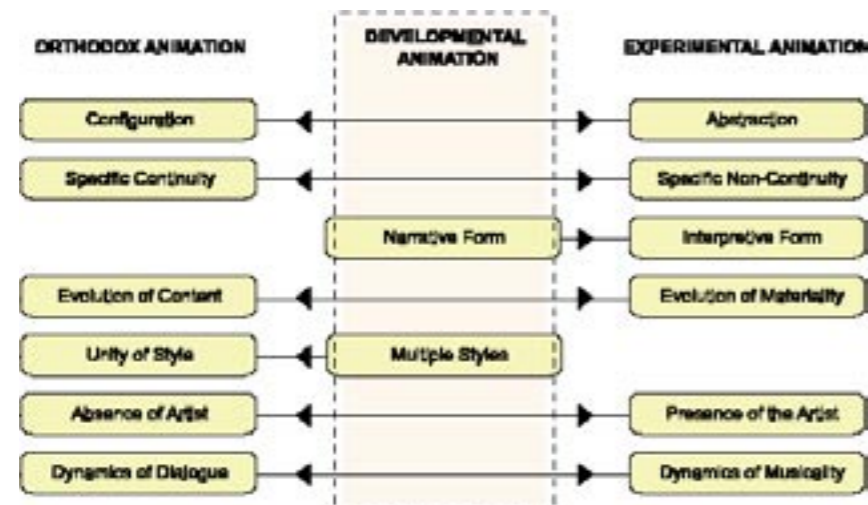
Amidst, these two extremes emerges ‘developmental animation’ that operates as a mode of expression combining or selecting elements of both the above approaches and thus representing an aesthetic and philosophic tension between the two apparent extremes.



However, considering the probability theory, there are numerous possible sets of characteristic combinations that could all qualify to contribute to a film being categorised as developmental animation and listing these sets becomes a monumental task. For the sake of this paper, therefore, it becomes necessary to identify a characteristic from each end of the spectrum in order to form the core of the most basic ‘developmental animated film’

“... Belgian animator, Raoul Servais, believes, however, that whatever the methodology informing the construction of the film, and no matter how short it is, it should always have a story of some sort” (Canemaker, 1988: 66)

Owing to my bias of narrative importance and those expressed by others, I find it necessary to highlight and include ‘narrative form’ as one of the characteristic identifiers of the ‘developmental animated film’. In addition, the use of multiple styles or ‘style variation’ i.e. the focal point of this paper most reasonably becomes the other identifier.



Hence, the two most basic characteristics of any film that I investigate in the remainder of this paper will be ‘narratives’ that have employed the technique of ‘style variation’. As mentioned earlier, style variation within the narrative form, contributes to an aesthetic and philosophic tension between the two extremes of orthodox and experimental animation – such is the nature of the ‘developmental animated film’.

## 26. David Bordwell’s Four ways of Making Meaning

### Referential Meaning.

We construct a version of the *diegesis*, or spatio-temporal world, and an ongoing narrative (*fabula*). Bordwell writes: "In constructing the film's world, the spectator draws not only on knowledge of filmic and extrafilmic conventions but also on conceptions of causality, space and time and on concrete items of information." Bordwell calls this the referential meaning.

**Explicit Meaning.** We may also abstract or assign a conceptual meaning to the *fabula* and *diegesis*. Here we find in the film cues we take to indicate how the film intends to be interpreted. Bordwell calls this the explicit meaning of a film and categorizes the referential and explicit as the "literal" meaning.

**Implicit Meaning.** We may additionally construct covert, symbolic, or implicit meanings. Bordwell writes: "The spectator may seek to construct implicit meanings when she cannot find a way to reconcile an anomalous element with a referential or explicit aspect of the work; or the 'symbolic impulse' may be brought in to warrant the hypothesis that any element, anomalous or not, may serve as the basis for of implicit meanings."

**Symptomatic Meaning.** Finally, we may construct "repressed or symptomatic" meanings that the work reveals "involuntarily." Symptomatic meanings clash with referential, explicit, or implicit meanings. Bordwell writes: "If explicit meaning is like a transparent garment, and implicit meaning like a semiopaque veil, symptomatic meaning is like a disguise."

## 29. Bordwell's example of ‘making meaning’ discourse

Bordwell says that while one critic may say that Fellini’s 8<sup>1/2</sup> expresses its theme of aging without the use of symbols or narcissistic musings but in episodes that arise naturally out of the drama – hence making the film “nothing but a pleasurable work of art... a worldly film, all on the surface...delightfully obvious”, another critic can always claim that sticking to the literal level ignores the intriguing possibilities of meaning offered by the text, and that a closer look is essential.

## 32. Discussion of Waking life as an Animated Production

In their book entitled **Film Art**, authors David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson distinguish between so called live-action filmmaking, and what animators do, by stating;

‘... Animators create a series of images by shooting one frame at a time. Between the exposure of each frame, the animator changes the subject being photographed.’

It also becomes necessary to question the form of a film such as ‘Waking Life’, when studying its attributes

"Traditional animation is locked into a particular 'character design' forcing the artist to conform to a predetermined style," Sabiston explains. "Waking Life is not animated in the truest sense of the word. It is a composite of wildly different, re-imagined video scenes drawn in cartoon style."

“Thousand Words Production” *Waking Life* <<http://www.thousand-words.com/pro/waking.html>>

Waking Life can be called an animation because it arguably respects the process of frame by frame creation of images in postproduction, however it tends not to agree with the characteristics laid down by Paul Wells for orthodox animation.

## 34. ‘Second Order realism and post-modernist aesthetics in computer animation’ by Andy Darley

Andy Darley on the subject of computer generated imagery in his paper ‘*Second Order realism and post-modernist aesthetics in computer animation*’ defines ‘second order realism’ as a form of realism where every object and environment, though recognizably real, precise in its construction and logical in the execution of its own laws, becomes essentially over determined, moving into a realism which is simultaneously realistic but beyond the orthodoxies of realism. It is essentially an attempt to produce ways of seeing or representing by other means.

Jayne Pilling, *A Reader in Animation Studies: Second-order realism and post modernist aesthetics in computer animation by Andy Darley*. Chapter 3, pg 16

### *Additional Reading*

Rotoscope on Snow White

[http://mag.awn.com/index.php?type=pageone&article\\_no=1404&page=3](http://mag.awn.com/index.php?type=pageone&article_no=1404&page=3)

Disney soon employed rotoscoping techniques for *Snow White*, to more distracting effect. The rotoscoped human characters in *Snow White* look like they come from a different universe than the Dwarves and animals — and what's worse, a far less interesting universe. It's a perfect visual distillation of the problem that dogs most fairytales, where the main protagonists are usually far duller than the intriguing side-characters who fill out the world's corners. Even when the human characters in *Snow White* strain for expressiveness, they seem reigned in: the rotoscoping smoothes away some of the particularities that might have otherwise been gleaned from the faces and bodies of the actors. Everything that has been subtracted from the actors is present, in heightened form, in the plastic (and wholly animated) features of the Dwarves.

