

## Dynamic Animation.

### The Potential of Abstract Animation.

(Large portions of this text first appeared as an audiovisual presentation “Why Abstract Animation Matters” at MIAF Render ACMI June 2014 and was also published in Render “The annual journal of creative Australian Animation. October 2015)

The human condition is based on story telling to our own minds and to each other. In order to make our sense of our worlds we make narratives out of every event that has, is or might happen some time in the future. Are films and animations merely a way to repeat this process or are they also a great way to create space within stories and even perhaps to create temporary freedom from stories and narration? Static, dualistic thinking may posit story and abstraction as if binary opposites but in reality, especially in the case of animation, I feel they are interdependent dynamic partners.

Abstraction and storytelling are symbiotically linked – words are abstract referents to things or events and are effectively employed in storytelling. Abstract impressions from light, colour, visual forms, nuances of movement for instance are as important to our experience as any carefully crafted spoken words or written text. Even in our own perceptual systems or bodies, our sense of self comes to our awareness first from (the) non-verbal and even (the) pre-verbal. We never have the time or knowing consciousness to be able to assign a word even in our own minds to the multitude of felt simultaneous impulses from the soup of sensory data flow we find ourselves swimming in. This sensory data flow is a continuous stream of two-way information and responses that affect each other. Sensory information is received, recreated and returned to our minds and our environment in a constant interactive and interdependent feedback loop. It could be claimed that how and what we see, feel and respond to, actually changes us, our environment and other creatures. There are not enough words in this short article to appease or indulge the rational academic request of completing this particular story with its’ own history of ideas, verification, attributions and masses of further reading some few suggestions are footnoted here though.<sup>1</sup>

You may find these ideas far-fetched, flawed, nonsensical or simply accepted as given factors of life, like air and water. More importantly, for this pragmatist, these ideas have everything to do with abstract animation and film. These ideas point to a potential of film in its full gamut of multi-sensory, experimental, narrative and abstract parameters that can be most successfully accommodated in animated film.

The prevalence of screens and of our cyber selves constantly engaging in networked global electronic ‘communication’ has expanded our consciousness, changed how we think and increased our exposure to the fusing of abstraction and figuration. If Jordan Belson and others in the late 1960s and early 1970s were interested in cinema’s role as expanding our consciousness, film-makers and animators now may simply see cinema’s role as better understanding our consciousness. My own film *Pop Psychology* attempts to engage the viewer in a game of perceptual testing; rapid-fire attention grabbing syncretic sound and visual moving forms. In this schema of film there may be no single storyline, or any easily identifiable progression of narrative logic but there is a tightly woven pattern or musical structure. This construction attempts to purposefully combine simultaneous pure abstraction based on color fields and geometric shapes with rich associations of organic looking forms and recognisable movements, the anima or life force of animation.

<sup>1</sup> On Intersubjectivity – “Time Sense” Takuya Suzuki “Self Comes to Mind” & Antonio Damasio

Animation is the result of osmosis between abstraction and narrative – linear, dynamic and multi-layered forms. This may not necessarily apply only to ‘abstract or experimental animation’. Australian animation in 2015 is much more than at a crossroad – it is genuinely sitting in the middle of a massive, horrendously complex and energetic intersection. Animation can be seen in the intersections between art and commerce, narrative and abstraction, motion graphics, story, movement, stasis, consciousness and gestalt, public, shared and private contexts, large scale projections, hand held, wrist watch, t-shirt screens, active, passive, interactive, audience as artist, singular visions, collaborative and relational processes, good ole fashioned distributed authorship and more. It is these “tensions between elements of narrative and abstraction, stillness and movement, sonic melody and texture, between the wish to shake or disturb the senses and to relax or calm the mind”<sup>2</sup> that I feel animation is primed for exploring. Animation can be the sculpting of time-based movement of shapes, light, colour drama and emotion of one sort or another literal and poetic. If over fifteen years of MIAF has taught us anything it is that Animation among all its other fine business is also a solid contributor to the fine arts.

Abstract and experimental approaches to Animation can be about provoking, generating, asking questions. Desire to capture recreate immediacy, according to the authors of “Post digital” it is the desire to recreate the experience of when we are first born into the world and see ourselves as inseparable from it and each other.

Abstract and experimental, heck any interesting animation can be about more than the following types of questions; “wtf is this?”; “why am I watching this?”; “what can I get out of watching this right now?”; “why should I feel good about wasting my time watching this?” The value of abstract animation for this animator is that it attempts to set up a context of viewing where the audience can become author of their own interpretation, and awareness of the immediate and transient experience. This context can also be one of forgetting and letting go of the need or expectation let alone the demand to know anything – let alone everything. And possibly to accept at the same time that somewhere in the organisation of our complex pattern of molecules and cells that we might already unconsciously know everything – or everything we need to know at any given instant.

Abstraction is too often simplistically referred to as visual abstraction or distortion of actually clearly referent or recognisable images. Just as interesting and important is the idea of abstract connections, the mad morphing associative and lateral jumps possible with all forms of animation or the dream logic of surrealism, dada, David Lynch, Michel Gondry et al. Sudden jumps, shifts in tone or distortions, morphing of styles, time and space are all easily accommodated in animation form.

Recent neuroscience discoveries tell us that when our sense of “self comes to our mind” it is plastic, networked and dynamic not innate, fixed or hierarchical.<sup>3</sup>

Our consciousness and sub consciousness is actually made of electrical charges, chemical materials, self organising memory-like reactions and complexity built from the simplest of cells. All animation is made up of, and has a pervasive affect on, other matter from collection thought processes embodied in culture and cultural attitudes to the physical artifacts of films in so many forms to the deeply personal matter of our Hearts, Minds and Souls; the unspoken vital senses of being our conscious and unconscious selves.

The experience of Animation for both author and audience, abstract or figurative is potentially a dynamic way of considering the unknown, the infinite, the inexpressible the inarticulate and the actually very clearly

<sup>2</sup> MIAF Catalogue notes for *City Symphony Noise Poem* – Paul Fletcher

<sup>3</sup> The Self Comes to Mind – Antonio Damasio

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spoken, often without words, but with the recreation of the very real but undefined feelings we feel before our text based abstractions can interpret and explain them.

“The power of abstract animation is to capture the moment between breaths, to create direct emotional expressions without words or texts, to explore the interconnection and vibration (*resonances*) of all things, thoughts and energy, the beautiful simplicity underlying any perceived complexity and perhaps even some small reclaiming of childhood wonderment, imagination, curiosity energy and fun.”



