

Flux and flurry

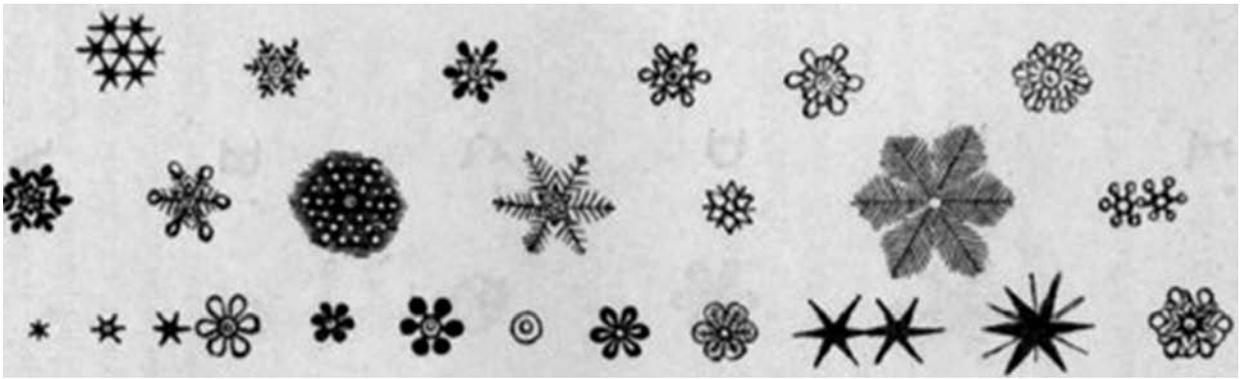
Stillness and hypermovement in animated worlds

Esther Leslie

Animation, as any Wikipedia reader knows, is ‘the optical illusion of movement’, whether achieved through photographing drawings, moving clay models and recording the tweaks frame by frame, drawing directly on film or devising models digitally. But the definition is a weak one, or only a starting point. Not only animation but all film/video proceeds by generating an ‘optical illusion of movement’. A recording device samples fragments of the world, repeatedly biting a moment of time from its flow. Later the resulting still frames of a film or video strip are cranked or streamed into motion, generating a second-order re-creation of the motion of which they had once been part. Furthermore, to define animation as ‘the optical illusion of movement’ makes it impossible to think of animated stillness – perhaps rightly so. But, in one way or another, there is much stillness in animation: from the aforementioned individual cels or frames at animation’s root to the static backgrounds that accompany a scene’s main action; from production storyboards to those moments, occasioned by the narrative or gag, when everything has to stop. This must be qualified: it is true only inasmuch as stillness can ever be said to exist and is not itself something of an illusion. It is, after all, a question of scale whether the movement that inhabits all things is perceived and, in addition, the perceiving eye itself is always in movement. Moreover, what animation or any cinematic production presents is not simply an illusion of movement. It is movement itself: movement of the image data through the projecting mechanism, which produces movement on the screen. There is, indeed, an animation technique that explores vision’s contingency and the relativity of stillness and movement through the extreme extension of time. Bullet time or time slice or view morphing stills the scene or object within the flow of the film or moves it only at extreme slowness, while our view of it changes constantly, as the visions of multiple cameras are sequenced. Thereby a frozen moment of

time is stretched out, presenting us not so much with an example of the optical illusion of movement of an object but rather with the perception of movement itself in motion.

A definition of animation, found in the relays between movement and stillness, is outlined here, perversely perhaps, by exploring some scenes or sites that are more or even much less conventionally conceivable as animation. At first glance these are motionless sites, but, on closer examination, they prove to be sites of movement, in various ways. The characterization of animation pursued is different to the commonsensical. It is best described as an insistence that animation’s special contribution to cinematic culture is not the illusion of movement but rather, chiastically, and at least potentially, the movement of illusion, a displacement that brings to light or focuses the given illusion even to the point of dispelling it. It does this through the condensation, within and between animated elements, of a number of movements, a series of passages between different states and forces, conditions and temporalities. A shorthand version of my definition is *animation is ‘different nature’* or *animation is ‘non-indifferent nature’*. Animation is ‘different nature’ (Benjamin¹) because it is different to ours, but not distinct from it. Animation reflects on nature, but shatters its laws in its physics-defying recombinations of space, time and matter. Animation proposes ‘small worlds’, each one bound by the newly and specifically devised laws of the animator. Animation is ‘non-indifferent nature’ (Eisenstein²), because it appeals to us, invites us into its particular small world. Its appeal is mediated via technology and is a shuttle between the image world of a new or second nature and us, addressed too as nature. We are invited in for the duration of the show. This image world or microcosm is, in turn, appropriated – or, better, inhabited – by its viewers. Animation’s small and dialectical image worlds propose certain stances on the part of viewers, encouraging them to



a comprehensive record of the only recently potentially legible Egyptian hieroglyphics. Mysterious and extraterrestrial worlds are visualized. Furthermore, as Benjamin notes of an epoch that, with its widespread promulgation of possession, is turning away from the optical towards the 'tactile',⁴ these largest worlds – offworlds – are made graspable, quite literally, as they are taken into the viewer's hand in image form. When Bentley devised a way to capture snowflakes, he was performing likewise a seemingly impossible task. He was capturing accurately the image of something tiny and ephemeral, enlarging it vastly and making a permanent record of it for hands-on leisurely and scientific contemplation.

However, by Bentley's time, some forty-odd years into its life, photography comes to be better known as a mediator of more everyday visions. It is increasingly associated with multiplication, reproduction and a recording of the mundane. The relationship to, on the one hand, the outlandish and mysterious and, on the other, the scientific and exploratory, slips behind more prosaic and superficial uses of the medium. Bentley's practice, though (like other examples of nature photography), holds on to the twin aspects of photography as magical and scientific, in the context of normalization of the photograph. His work presents another image of contradictory nature. Photography, a mechanical form of image production, bore important implications for the shaping of concepts such as originality and uniqueness, key concepts of traditional art understanding. Photography and film possessed no original. Each print from the negative was only as 'original' as the next or the one before it, which is to say not original at all. In this context it is of some fascination that Bentley's first photographs of snow crystals in 1885 and then the thousands that follow, despite their endlessly reproducible nature, despite their multiple, series-like appearance, provide evidence for quite the opposite – a proof of the cliché that largely still holds as scientifically true: that no two snow crystals are the same. A technique of multiplicity garners proof of uniqueness. It is not giant

off-worlds brought down to earth, in this case, but rather the tiniest portions of our universe projected larger. The smallest particle is amplified and makes thereby, in representation, a small image world in itself, particular, unique, complex and intricate. Microphotography – and never more so than in the case of snow crystals – is a replicational, repetitive technology that evinces heterogeneity, the disparateness of nature displayed to the eye as curiosity.

Snow forms in the atmosphere, perhaps around a microscopic dust particle or on a frozen droplet. The six branches of the crystal grow from bombardment by water molecules present in air's vapour. Each snow crystal self-organizes its hexagonal lattice, a complex result of repetition, under a particular and peculiar set of circumstances: the specific temperatures in the air at various points, the particular supersaturation at the time of formation, might favour the formation of snow needles, or, instead, plates, stars or columns. Blown through clouds, every crystal is subjected to random shifts of temperature. Each forms in response to these fluctuating conditions, which are unrepeatable. Some journey down from the sky intact, their intricate designs preserved. Some fuse with cloud droplets or conglomerate into flakes. Each life history is recorded in the crystal and made visible in microphotography. What the viewer receives, in the microphotograph, is static, an arrest of a process of falling, floating, melting. Yet still, it might be said, these photographs constitute a type of animation, for they provide, in a flash, evidence of diachronic processes, of individual and heterogeneous 'biographies', 'physiognomic aspects'⁵ – that is to say, indications of deep structures, processes and character – legible through the surface of the finished form.

In 1893, a little while after Bentley's first photographs, the German meteorologist Gustav Hellmann published his scientific reflections on snow crystals. These were accompanied by heliogravures from microphotographs by Richard Neuhaus. Originally, Hellmann confesses, each winter, gleeful at the appearance

of snow, he tried to sketch individual snow crystals, but melting and evaporation meant he had to fill in the missing parts and so he relied on symmetry. Comparing these drawings with crystals glimpsed for a moment under a microscope, they appeared ‘too schematic and too stiff’.⁶ Hellmann observes how drawings, as, for example, in the sketches of Mrs Glaisher, carried out at her meteorologist husband James’s behest, idealize the crystal’s form. The drawings of snow crystals produce symmetrical, geometric figures that do not exist in actuality. They do this as a way of finishing off an image whose original model was long melted away. Or perhaps drawing captured a geometry that existed only for a moment long ago at the snow crystal’s formation, never to be visible to a human eye.⁷ In contrast to the drawing, the microphotographs reveal imperfections, asymmetries, deformations, deviations from the laws, which is to say that the photographs detail the ‘reality’ of the snow crystal. Through the microphotographs, Hellmann commented:

Now we no longer have ideal shapes and schematic figures in front of us, but real images, as offered to us by nature. Indeed, one could say that, in spite of the icy congealment of the object what we see here are images of nature as warm as life.⁸

The human eye perceives – after the intervention of the mechanical eye with its enlarging lens – a ‘real image’, an image of reality. The microphotography of snow crystals mediates, via the camera, what Walter Benjamin characterizes as a different nature, one that is accessible to machine-enhanced perception. This different nature visaged by the machine is now deemed more real, more lively.

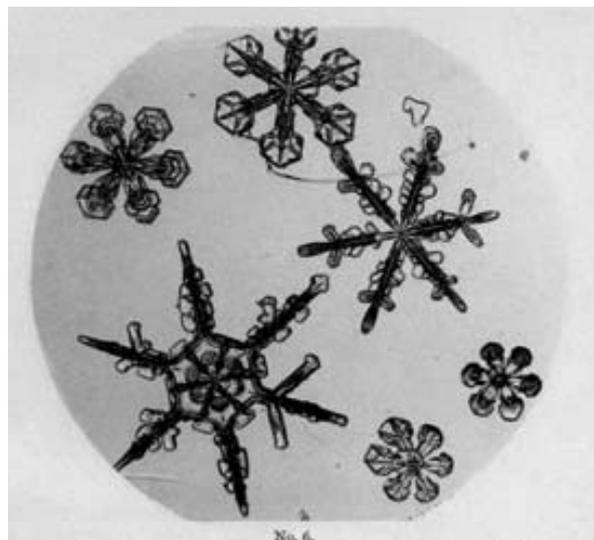
Benjamin’s essay ‘Little History of Photography’ details the other nature available to machine-enhanced perception.

For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: ‘other’ above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious.⁹

For Benjamin the camera reveals aspects, indeed whole worlds of images, ‘physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things’,¹⁰ that have previously never been seen before – except perhaps in dreams. The camera discloses these through its barrage of effects that assault the unquestioned coherence of actuality: slow motion and enlargement, for example. It routes vision through the machine and so detaches humans from their conscious, or habitual, modes of seeing. It ‘reveals the secret’ and so, paradoxically, dredges the world up from unconsciousness into being

known. Just as Hellmann deems photographed nature livelier than drawn, schematized nature, Benjamin too endows the photographed image of nature, or the nature that comes into being photographically, with a liveliness or vividness that results from a more intense knowing.

Close-ups are a key vehicle of this knowing and they are attuned to the requirements of a photography of the everyday, which differs in terms of its scale from



R. Neuhaus, 1893

the earlier epoch’s bringing of vast stars and the moon and the sun miniaturized down to earth. In Benjamin’s view, the knowledge that photography as close-up uncovers is also a curious one. The different nature that the camera imports discovers the ‘mysterious’ in the everyday, according to Benjamin in his description of the close-ups of plants by Karl Blossfeldt. These reveal strange analogies, ones that intermingle natural and artefactual forms and dramatize the action of the camera on nature. That is to say, these are images of ‘different nature’ or second nature, of a nature confronted by creative human labour self-constituting and expressing a world-view, kinship and protection, in short human civilization: ancient columns in horse willow, a bishop’s crosier in the ostrich fern, totem poles in tenfold enlargements of chestnut and maple shoots, and gothic tracery in the fuller’s thistle. As such the images are evidence that nature too can be a realm of human transformation in coordination with technology and thought. Hellmann discovers analogies through the magnifying lens too, though his do not invoke the philosophical conundrums of second nature. That the snow crystal resembles other natural forms, botanical forms in particular, is the revealed secret of the magnifying lens, the exposed filmstrip and the time-defying coated papers. It is the magical trick or

technologically acquired fact which makes tangible what was not tangible before – for example, that snow crystal columns are hollow tubes.

What the machine brings back for vision is not dead, not ahuman or inanimate, even if the mechanism that recovers it is. Rather, as Hellmann phrases it, it makes images that are ‘warm as life’. And while the photographed ice crystals never move before the eye, the image that appears on the filmstrip and gets printed on photographic papers is the end-result of a process that takes place over time – or through history. It betrays the marks of such process in its imperfections, thus compounding time or history in a single image that is as ‘warm as life’ because it is so real. That is to say, animation – the apparent ‘breath’ of life (a meaning suggested by its root *anima*, a cognate of *animus*, or mind) – might be found in what seems like stillness. The microphotograph of the snow crystal brings into vision a small image world imbued with life interrupted, cancelled, preserved, and like ours it is one in which historical process has produced the present state of things. The frozen mobile nature of ice is frozen again, through the camera, into a stilled image, a ‘different nature’, but that image of ‘different nature’ pulsates with life. Indeed its ‘different nature’ is, it could be said, just such enhanced liveliness. Animation may be the very state of the different nature that inhabits a small image world.

Perhaps microphotography distils something intrinsic to animation: its achievement is, it seems, to conjure a world that pulsates with physicality, analogy and potential, even where life appears to be arrested. Through processes of replication – the replication of nature in image, the replication of the image from the filmstrip – a unique and heterogeneous image world is discovered.

Another scene: snow globes

The snow globe protects a little world housed under glass or, later, transparent plastic. The scene is untouchable, but the globe itself exists precisely to be grasped in the hand, which neatly fits around its rounded or oval contours, in order every so often to shake up the artificial snowflakes or flitter. After shaking, it is as if life has suddenly entered and then crept away again. The snow globe comes properly to life only when it is replete with a liquid that becomes invisible, functioning solely as a medium for impeding and transporting bone, rice, polystyrene or glitter pieces until they settle.

The snow globe meddles somehow with life and lifelessness, though where the emphasis lies has been

differently perceived. For Adorno, the glass globes house *Nature morte*, still life, dead life. Their appeal to Walter Benjamin, who collected them, like that of other ‘petrified, frozen or obsolete components of culture’,¹¹ such as fossils or plants in herbariums, signals, for Adorno, Benjamin’s attraction to everything that has alienated from itself any ‘homely aliveness’. The snow globe is an emblem of de-animation, of the passage to a reified death or non-life as characterizes experience in industrial and bureaucratic capitalism. For the literary theorist Paul Szondi, the emphasis, on the contrary, was on the snow globe’s freeze-framing of a scene of life, not death. He called the snow globes ‘reliquaries’, which provide shelter, the preservation of something – a scene, an event – as image to bequeath to the future in the shape of hope.¹² A cruder, crueller description might argue that the globe replicates a standardized moment of happiness ad infinitum. The snow globe fixates the mind on a special moment stilled forever, except for the intermittently falling snow.

The snow globe is always an ideal scene, a composite or fantasy, a small image or imagined world



that existed only in dreams and that comes to life in its being moved, in displacement. Is the snow globe animated? Unlike the microphotograph of the snow crystal, it is unreal, in Hellmann’s terms – that is to say, not photographic or indexical. It is an image of perfection, a plastic mould loosely based on reality – reinvented, with blue backing, in Germany, in the 1950s, as a vehicle for an excess production of flat plastic brooches. It is the image of an ideal or idea. The snow globe perhaps concentrates animation in its most basic form. Animation is a type of giving life technically. The life endowed to the snow globe emerges out of the most basic gesture – a waving of the hand. The snow globe is animated for a moment by an external action, brought from lifelessness into life; it sparks a memory or fantasy. Its animation is ignited in the animation of the flakes and completed in the wistful and transported mind of the viewer.

Snow crystal photography, snow globes: two sites where a flurry of contradictions is catalysed. Animated dramas occur in both these small image worlds: a rapid flux, a shift from one state to another, reversals of scale, an interplay of replication and uniqueness, sameness and difference, a summoning in both of concentrated imaginative power.

Ice and artifice

Where snow and ice are there are always opposites at work. Where there is opposition there is dynamism, mobility, movement and transformation – which may be why it offers itself especially for utopian reverie, for example in the Christmas card, the painting by Caspar David Friedrich, the ice sculpture or palace. Under snow colour is extinguished by whiteness. Roughness is overlaid by the smoothness of ice. And, furthermore, ice and snow are made of water. This fluid, the fluid of fluids, is frozen into crystals. What was always moving becomes still, until it melts again back into water. Ice crystals are the immobilized that is dynamic through its interaction with environment. Ice is, therefore, a transient form, which is perhaps to say not a form at all, for it always presses towards formlessness again. There is something materially present in the constitution of ice that allows it to annex to powerful fantasies of renovation. Ice is a product of transformation – of water – and it transforms environments. A comic strip from 1906, one episode in Winsor McCay's series

Little Nemo in Slumberland, about the nightly dream escapades of a little boy, provides an emblem of this. Snow has fallen in Nemo's bedroom, a burgeoning drift accumulating as he drifts into sleep. Once he is fully covered by the thick snow Nemo burrows through the snow blanket in search of his father's room, but he loses his bearings and finds himself in Jack Frost's domain. Unable to repress the sound of his breathing, and so breaking the silence, he is chased by polar bears through the snowy landscape back to his bed, where Nemo wakes, as he does every week. The snow fell in a dream and seemed to fill the room itself. In his dream Nemo's room becomes a snow globe, and, like a snow globe, the room seems to be a microcosm of the wider world inside just one part of it, a world within a world, reflex of the way in which the dream might be seen as a repetition of the world within the smaller globe of the head. But what the comic strip also concentrates in its weekly encounters with snow, ice, storms, earthquakes, sudden climactic shifts, as well as mobile cities, and shifting interiors, is a peculiarly animated environment and an architecture of absolute impermanence and drama, such as characterizes that ushered in by capitalist industrial modernity.

Little Nemo drifts to the snowdrifts, but he lives in the city, and this is the realm that is most graphically animated in the weekly stories. Here nature is contained or bursts out. New York and its buildings, its streets, docks, rivers and alleyways leap into storylines.



In its becoming motive, New York, or the city space, is revealed in the comic strip as a place of modern anxiety about urban space, an unease generated by the built environment, with its monstrous power to crush, oppress, damage, or, in turn, be damaged by humans run amok. Little Nemo's adventures feature humans being pursued by tall buildings or humans knocking buildings down, because magically proportions have been suddenly and inexplicably reversed. Little Nemo's city is a place of constant disasters. Displayed in the elegant stretching and shrinking rectangles of the strip is a tangible anxiety about the relationship between city inhabitants and their novel and rapidly changing environments. And, to be crudely Marxist, in New York, the land was special, magical, with extraordinary powers of transformation. Land value rose rapidly. Land was sold or leased, buildings were flung up swiftly, causing earthquakes across the city. It was as if mud, stone, brick, concrete and steel spored value of their own accord. If ever there were a commodity fetishism of land it was here on this little island – where buildings become animate or take on human characteristics, human weaknesses, and sometimes humans assume the destructive force of tumbling buildings. To embed the peculiar energies of the city of capital further in the motives of the comic strip, Winsor McCay stretched *Little Nemo's* panels vertically to accommodate the new skyscraper-ordained dimensions of city life.

Slumberland is terrifying, not least because its small worlds fling up newly invented horrors and dislodgements week after week. In his studies of modernizing Paris, Walter Benjamin specified a tempo characteristic of industrial capitalist modernity: the eternal recurrence of the ever-same in the guise of the new. This is the tempo of technologically reproduced culture within capitalism, just as it is that of any commodity: replication that resembles heterogeneity. It has its horror-face in the endless movement of conveyor-belt commodity production. Cartooning is a particularly graphic version of this hellish temporality. The cel after cel or frame after frame, churned out again and again, means that structurally it is based on such a repetition with difference. Generically, too, cartoons are notorious for dishing up the ever-same product with the smallest tweaks as stimulus to sales. But Slumberland also possesses its utopian side. McCay's ever-returning strips present the city as what Walter Benjamin terms in his thoughts on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility' a *Spielraum*, a place of play, with room for manoeuvre, something that he theorizes as a beneficial characteristic of technological

modernity. The presence of *Spielraum* allows, at least imaginatively, the possibility of possibility, of the new, of the different to all this.

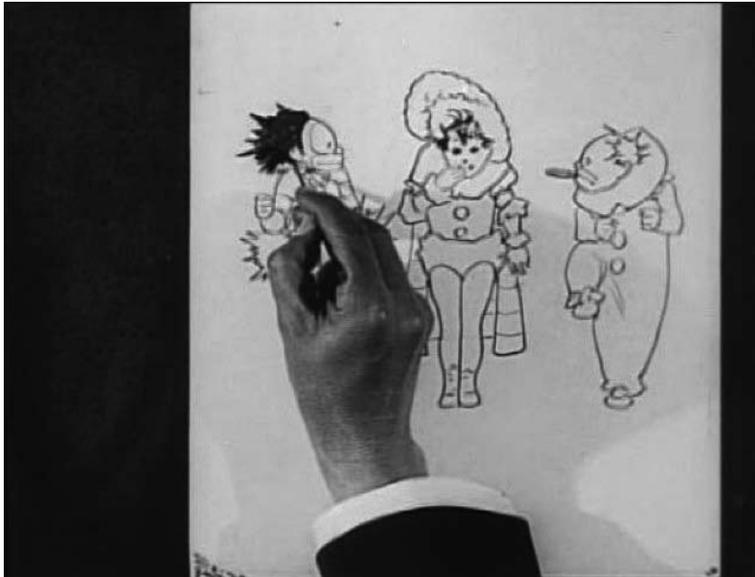
Winsor McCay was also, from 1911, an animator – where his comic strips thematically set the city in motion, his animations used the rhythms of modernity concretely. His first one transformed Nemo to the screen, tentatively. Inside the boxes of New York offices, men conspire to give flat shapes life and colour. There is little narrative in this animation, which consists of an unmotivated, illogical squashing and stretching, the very principle of cartooning. It could be described as an example of the 'optical illusion of movement', though it is honest about its source and does not seek to deceive. It might better be described as a rumination on the passage between living and drawing, between lifelessness and life, identity and non-identity. It is not an illusion of movement but presents movement itself, as a feat, rushing through the projector, the result, as the film makes clear, of thousands of drawings and gallons of ink.

Could the motion generated in these first studio-offices of mass cultural production be seen as a modelling of the dynamic, ever-changing forms of modernity? More specifically, it is a modelling of its seemingly motive force, the commodity economy – whose endless replications and innovations, and whose commodity fetishism, are analogously evident in the animated objects' push beyond their own objectivity.

Animation, then, as rendition of commodity fetishism, that illusory hyperliveliness of objects, a topsy-turvy negation of the value that stems from labour. What is animation but objects coming seemingly to life, without human intervention, so it appears. And yet it is also the realm in which such graphic rendition might make social forms available to knowledge, conscious, in the sense of Walter Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' of photography and cinema, a new mode of seeing beyond seeing, using the segmenting powers of the camera and cinematic technology on a dissected image world that must be broken down in order to be made up again. As such animation might be not just the illusion of movement but also the movement of illusion. Frozen social relations are warmed into life; the rigid surface unthaws. Animation has its analytical, critical face. It melts the congealed surface of daily life with its analytical and utopian stance.

As many have argued, animation contains within itself always a sense in which its objects and images, drawn or modelled, are motile, flexible, open to possibility, able to extend in any direction, undertake any action or none. Sergei Eisenstein devised a category of

‘plasmaticness’ that he evoked in order to stress this originary shape-shifting potential of the animated, the way in which an object or image, drawn or modelled, strains beyond itself, could adopt potentially any form, thereby rescinding all back to a moment of ‘hope in the past’, a future potential, beyond current constraints.¹³ It was not frozen water that Eisenstein evoked in relation to this ecstatic plasmaticness – despite the references to Snow White. It was its opposite and nemesis, fire, which, observes Eisenstein, ‘is capable of most fully conveying the dream of a flowing diversity of forms’.¹⁴ This is animation’s utopian axis. It is the one that Walter Benjamin emphasized in his reading of Mickey Mouse, in the essay ‘Experience and Poverty’ from 1933. Mickey Mouse embodies the utopian aspiration for a technology-ravaged, yet technology-dependent, populace.¹⁵ Mickey Mouse inhabits a miraculous universe in which objects exchange properties – suddenly a cow is a musical box or a skirt a parachute. In Benjamin’s



analysis, Mickey Mouse is seen to fulfil the wish for a harmonious reconciliation of technology and nature, a graphic recognition of Eisenstein’s ‘non-indifferent nature’, in the hostile conditions of an age when technological change threatens to destabilize human existence, and also destroy it. But the benign union of technology and nature has to be relegated to the dream world of comics, photographs and cinema, where machinery indulges humans, for in reality, in industrial capitalism, technology and nature – that is machinery and humans – are dead set against each other, torn apart or tearing each other apart in labour and war.

Still animation now

A French artist by the name of Guillaume Paris is producing small image worlds today. He has adapted

the strategies of Dada and Surrealism but sharpens and demolishes in their spirit their relationship to advertising and commodity culture. Paris has a project called H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D., an acronym for Holistic and Utopian Multinational Alliance for New World Order and Research in Living and Dying (or formerly The New Perishable Gallery). In this his referent is anthropology and the aim, he says, is a critical reflection on ‘multiculturalism and globalization’, an updating of the anthropological, ‘primitivist’ and internationalist fascinations that motivated the Surrealists and Dadaists before him. H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D. is a collection, a trashy one, far trashier than André Breton’s collation of tribal and curious items. Paris has been collecting packaging for several years. He collects packaging that has faces on it. Much packaging has faces. Paris archives the packages: producing a gallery of ideal types, making eye contact, commodity-masks, sorted according to genus, gender, family-product relations and so on. Paris holds on to the packages and their contents, as they perish. He says the following:

Primarily intended to represent human beings on an international scale, H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D. is akin to a traditional portrait gallery. Its constituents (referred to as ‘portrait-products’) are supermarket products the packaging of which features a realistic representation of a human being. These products are generally of a perishable nature. For any given product, a single specimen (packaging + contents) is entered in H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D., with the guarantee that it will never be replaced. The products are treated as unique individuals that have been reified through representation.¹⁶

This small image world threatens to grow vast. H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D.’s Community comprises three elements: the constituents (portrait-products) treated individually as reified beings, which are left to perish, something that the glorious shiny commodity bauble is never supposed to do; Sub-Community, the individuals (men, women, children) who, in real life, have sold their faces to the products; Meta-Community, the artificial lives (avatars) generated from the humanism of the commodity. In a parallel virtual world meta-community the commodities have a whole social world in which they age and die – or, with the aid of computer technologies, give birth to new commodities, minglings of their attributes, and generate the meta-community in forms of ‘artificial spirituality’.

Paris mediates the commodities in various ways, through animating processes, videoing them, digitalizing them. He uses forensic science to paint portraits of the faces on packages envisaging how they might look today. All these faces stare out at us the viewers, making us the object of art's gaze in its guise as commodity. In various ways, Paris 'extends

the humanism of the commodity to its logical conclusion (and beyond)'. He bestows subjectivity on the commodity, to a ludicrous degree, just as cartooning used absurdism to unmask motive forces – of technology, of violence, in industrial capitalist society.

One of Paris's ploys is to find the models who 'in real life have sold their faces to the commodity' – these he locates across the world after some years' delay. Then he films their lips talking in the present about their dreams and hopes. These lips are then montaged back onto a film of the commodity package. Their older self turns into speaking commodities. He explains it thus:

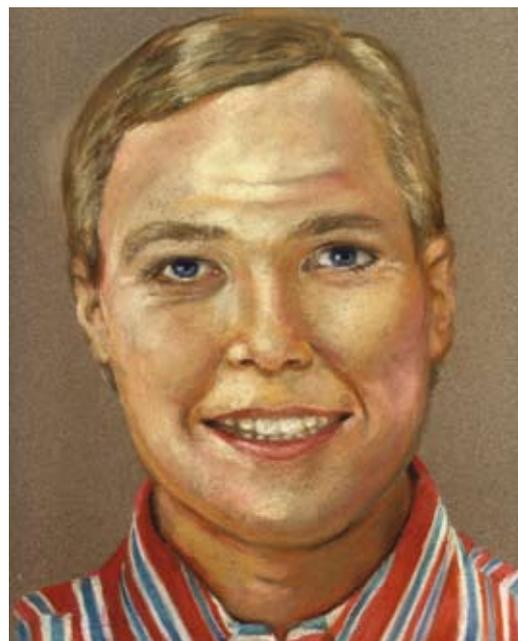
Resuscitated ('de-reified') in such a fashion, they are encouraged to express themselves subjectively, and to communicate with each other. The interactive installation *We Are The World* constitutes a first experiment in this direction. The installation brings together, in a physical space, one portrait-product from each country of the G7. In the absence of any human beings, the portrait-products of this model community speak among themselves, simultaneously, each one expressing itself in its mother tongue. This activity ceases as soon as a visitor enters the space: the animated objects are static again, and the faces silent.

Processes of animation are used here to mirror the overliveliness of the commodity world that would claim to be the world, the one that we may purchase in order to prove ourselves alive. At the same time, in naturalizing this second nature – through the contradictory conservation and enstagement of its perishability – process assails the commodity object.



And even if the packaging is largely indestructible, its immortality as object is compromised by its inevitable slippage out of style and fashion: the mock historical rhythm of fashion at least poses the passage of time as an issue.

Paris has also made a number of artworks that are something between representation and sculpture. These he calls 'permanent videos'. The form proposes something quite untenable – an incoherent clash of stillness and mobility, of eternity and the ephemeral that should be impossible. Paris watched Disney animated films frame by frame (an apparently protracted labour that negated the pleasure of the text, if ever an act did). He wondered if some further meaning might be squeezed from this degraded epitome of rubbishy kitsch. He discovered thereby a banality that once mobilized displaces the material into telling a truth about itself and offers a space for some other-thinking in the flow of time. Paris studied, for example, a scene in which Pinocchio lies face down in water for a few moments. This animated piece of wood, who wishes to be human,



is almost killed – that is, almost returns to the deadness that he is – but manages to survive and leap from the water. Except Paris found that in this scene one frame is repeated. This is the method of industrial culture, the culture industry that Adorno and Horkheimer eschewed. Its work is standardized. Short cuts are taken. Repetition occurs. Paris uses this fact of the material to loop the film. Pinocchio lies submerged and motionless in the water forever, while the water gushes endlessly in this permanent video titled 'Fountain'.

Kinder, 2003 (pastel on paper, frame, 34 x 31 x 4 cm),
Lois Gibson for H.U.M.A.N.W.O.R.L.D.

The animation circulates without ceasing: as indeed does the rhythm of production. And the join cannot be seen – or, alternatively, in this context emerges out of the optical unconscious in order to be the only thing seen. A similar effect is played out in ‘Minding’, where a perambulating owl, from Disney’s *Bambi*, its face always turned to the viewer, circles on a spot endlessly, without marking it ever, without moving forward in time one bit – stomping out something like the temporality of hell that is capitalism in Walter Benjamin’s typology, and permanently startled. Sisyphus at work, but this labour leaves no traces: an image perhaps of the clean virtual work of immaterial labour, which is the current myth of production. The owl’s eyes are never diverted: we are caught under his stare as much as he is fixed by ours. Nature is snared in the human bind of production: it would be different, it would be non-indifferent, but can only propose this as possibility. This permanent animation is simply repetition, is return without heterogeneity, is bleak, except that the moment of difference can be found in the twist of the strip that becomes its own critique. The surface and the deep structure of the animation combine to utter the horrid truth of the system that it upholds.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin’s phrase for this is ‘eine andere Natur’. This has been variously translated as ‘a different nature’ and ‘another nature’.

2. The phrase ‘non-indifferent nature’ is, of course, to be found where Eisenstein found it: in Hegel. It occurs in his discussion of Chemism in paras 200–203 of the *Logic*, where it is crucial to a discussion of motion, transformation and affinity in natural processes.
3. Walter Benjamin, ‘Kleine Geschichte der Photographie’ [1931] *Gesammelte Schriften*, volume II.1, p. 370. ‘Little History of Photography’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, volume 2: 1927–1934, Harvard Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 1999 p. 508.
4. Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, Harvard Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, p. 206.
5. Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’, p. 512.
6. Gustav Hellmann, *Schneekrystalle: Beobachtungen und Studien*, Rudolf Mückenberger, Berlin, 1893, Introduction, p. 9.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21
8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
9. Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’, p. 510. The line is repeated virtually word for word in Benjamin’s ‘Artwork essay’: see Benjamin, *Selected Works* volume 3, p. 117.
10. Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’, p. 512.
11. T.W. Adorno, ‘Charakteristik Walter Benjamins’, *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich, 1963, p. 237.
12. Peter Szondi, ‘Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin’ [1961], *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1978, pp. 500–501.
13. Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, Methuen, London 1988, p. 11.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
15. Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience and Poverty’, *Selected Writings*, volume 2, pp. 734–5.
16. Quotations from Paris and examples of the work can be seen on www.guillaumeparis.com/work.html and www.guillaumeparis.com/humanworld7.

