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Persistence of Vision: The Value of Invention in Independent Art Animation

In the practice of art being postmodern has many advantages, the primary one being that the whole gamut of previous art and experience is available as influence and inspiration in a non-linear whole. Music and image can be formed through determined methods introduced and delightfully disseminated by John Cage. Medieval chants can weave their way through hip-hopped top hits or into sound compositions reverberating in an art gallery. The traditional wax resist of batik and the digital pen on digital tablet are both available to the artist as tools for creating an image, perhaps a moving one. To not rummage through the treasure chest of the past for experience and for reference, is to miss inspiration and to create a limited dialogue.

In animation this is a particularly large resource as animation touches on and encompasses many other art forms - in particular dance, painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, and music. A sense of timing is needed, as well as choreography, color finesse, design, composition, and overall structure. Textures, colors, counterpoint and rhythm are assembled, moments of harmony, dissonance, tension and release orchestrated. Math is employed on many levels most obviously for the calculation of timing and exposures. Physics is employed in the invention of the instruments to create, control, or capture images, as well as a virtual physics that is necessitated to successfully fling, push, pull, or in some way motivate an object or shape through space.

Though its genesis is usually connected to the advent of film technology the attraction of moving, fabricated imagery pre-dates film. Mechanical slides and Chromatropes with gears and levers that moved the projected images were a crowd pleaser at magic lantern shows in the 1800's. (One of my favorites is a portrait of President Lincoln surrounded by a moving, optical illusion that predates psychedelic graphics from a century later!) Color organs, instruments that attempted to produce that innate linkage between sound and color, emerged as early as the 1734 with Father Louis-Bertrand Castel's 'Ocular Harpsichord' whose keys created a rhapsody of colored light when played. Some theorists even connect cave paintings enlivened by the dance of a torch to the intention to animate painted forms.

Such a long history, with so many connections to other forms - and thus their histories - would surely warrant a rich and varied vault to pull from. However, I would venture that this repertoire is not evidenced in the overarching, broad practice and pedagogy that is most often assumed by the term "animation". The emphasis most often is on narrative and character-driven scenarios, adhering to the principles set in motion by the early Disney studio. This is evidenced in the many animation festivals and websites that host animations that feature narratives filled with humor, heroes, and

floating, barely articulated characters. Perhaps this is also a symptom created by animation's "au courant" status, with commercials, music videos, games and television – not to mention animated special effects in feature films – enlisting animation. We like to look at things that move - it is a very appealing visual phenomenon. Yet, the limited animation method used on a majority of television shows speaks to a narrow experience of motion, focusing instead on dialogue – a sort of barely moving, and often beautiful, comic book story. And the term 'animation' is applied to many things that beg to be more accurately called simulation, demonstration, or animated illustration.

Like music, there are many genres, styles and practices enfolded within a single word. This has become particularly true with the prevalence of computers and accessibility of software programs that allows and encourages everyone to engage in the act of creation – no matter how informed or how visually/musically proficient! Computers have also made possible a flourishing assortment of avenues for distribution and access of work, from DVDs, the Web, iPods and other portable devices. (Cell phones are the current focus of many video, music and animation developers.)

With this broad playground being noted, the focus of this investigation is in the realm of animation that straddles the ever-shrinking gulf between a screening and an exhibition, the theater and the art gallery. There is a subtle maturity and movement in the animation art world that not only continues but also extends the often-overlooked legacy of independent animation while engaging the conceptual dialogue of contemporary art. This tradition of an art aesthetic is passed from the early inventors who fashioned the necessary tools and images, through the workshops of the Eastern European puppet makers and animators, to the fostering of the National Film Board of Canada, and the fertile ground of the Experimental Animation program created by Jules Engel at CalArts. The myriads of techniques and concepts evidenced throughout this history inform the current practitioner, just as digital technology and the aesthetic questioning of art offer a broad opportunity for frame-by-frame moving images.

In reviewing this arena, of art animation, and its possible manifestations, it is useful to first deconstruct the idea of animation, to strip it of its popular connotations. Then, to make an inquiry into the individual visions of some key artists and to see what *inventions* those visions necessitated. Such an investigation compels the contemporary animator to engage in the richness of a postmodern practice.

A definition and a thought
Animation, simply put, is frame-by-frame structuring of images. These are presented in a sequence at a speed and manner to engage the optical behavior known as persistence of vision, creating the illusion of moving images. Notable in this description is that images are addressed one at a time to build a whole and that the goal is to create the illusion of movement. This is different from "live action" which records whole sequences of 'real' actions and edits them together. It is more like music in that it is created from single notes, or chords, put together to form a whole, given structure and form as a composition. Each single visual frame is created or in

some cases it is *selected*, as it may be a captured real image just as a passage of sound may be a captured aural event.

Considering this pure, unembellished definition of animation allows one to entertain possibilities of images to create this illusion and mechanisms to provide the timing required to blend the images into a convincing moving form. In earlier animated imagery, such as the aforementioned magic lantern slides and the color organs, the images actually moved. No shutter or other device, as employed in the zoetrope, praxinoscope, and film projector was needed to interrupt the vision. Keys were pressed, gears were turned, and images moved, color changed. The zoetrope and other optical toys employed the principle of persistence of vision, in that our eyes retained an image for a moment after it was seen and would combine it with the next image experiencing a continuous motion. The possibilities offered by the schema of the zoetrope are still relevant and fresh as evidenced in the mesmerizing, life size sequential sculptures of Gregory Barsamian, where a timed strobe light provides the 'shutter' as these machines turn, creating the illusions such as hands dipped in books, a juggler whose tossed object change in midair. Understanding the basic principles, here of the persistence of vision, gives one a foundation and springboard.

There is the structuring then, of frame-by-frame or image-by-image, sculpture-by-sculpture forms, which when played in sequence via some technology creates the illusion of moving images. In addition there is the thought, the potential of image that animation can make possible. It allows the depiction of not just stories, but abstracted memories, impressions of light, color, and sound, psychological spaces, social constructs, hallucinations and closed-eye visions. It becomes the canvas for marks made on the consciousness of the individual, or a society of people. Nearly anything that can be envisioned, dreamed, and thought of – however surreal or illogical – can be subject matter for animation.

The animators
New media allows new possibilities. With the introduction of film, drawings came to life. Early film animation followed in the steps of quickly executed drawings performed for an audience; films such as the "Enchanted Drawings" (1900) animated by J. Stuart Blackton and Winsor McCay's "Gertie the Dinosaur" (1912). Here the magic of animation was revealed as the animator/actor interacted with the 'living' drawing during a performance. The dinosaur would dance on command; the live actor borrowed the top hat from the drawn character. The notion of performing with animation while over a hundred years old can have fresh, innovative interpretations. Kathy Rose, an animation artist who studied in the early 1970's at CalArts, combines her knowledge of dance, theater, and moving image to create evocative, mesmerizing performances such as "Kleopat'Ra". Here Rose uses her body, in monumental costume, and the stage screen as surfaces for projection and interaction. Black animated tears run down her face, drawn eyes stare wide open on closed eyelids.

The animation of John "J. Walt" Adamczyk is created as the audience looks on bringing the act of animation into the arena of live, theater events. "Autocosm:

Gardens of Thuban" was performed as the preshow to Siggraph 2005's Electronic Theater program. The images are generated from a program he authored making possible a 3D graphics environment that he can 'play' in real time using a joystick, a graphics tablet and a mixer. As the audience watches, shapes are drawn on the picture plane as we travel through a space that is slowly defined by its plant-like inhabitants. Their shape and character is defined by the pen stoke and the program, as is their behavior. Some sway, some can belch glowing particle spheres. Adamczyk points out the essential connection of the creator to the created as played out in his performance, with a clear lineage to Blackton's interaction his "Enchanted Drawings" and McCay with Gertie. His series entitled "Spontaneous Fantasia" gives a nod to the early Disney classic, but even more so to the early visual music pioneer Oskar Fischinger, whose work was the springboard for the Disney film and who is considered the grand patriarch of Visual Music.

The newly introduced medium of film also attracted the attention of modern artists such as Hans Richter, Man Ray, Viking Eggeling and Walter Ruttman as it provided the means to explore visual imagery with the added elements of time and motion. It also grabbed the attention of Fischinger, born in Germany in 1900, but unlike the others who were primarily painters, Fischinger began with film as his canvas.

Fischinger worked with abstract shapes and forms; lines, spirals and curves synchronized in space and time. Throughout his practice as an animator he often invented the tools and techniques he needed to realize his work. He reversed the color of his films so that black forms drawn on white paper appeared as white forms on a deep black ground. He created a wax-slicing device that would allow him to cut a thin slice from a multi-toned roll of wax, revealing an organic pattern. He filmed each successive exposed wax design so that when these were projected as a sequence they filled the frame with an environment of morphing, undulating forms. Creating patterns and rhythms akin to the choreography of Busby Berkeley, he employed stop-motion techniques to make cigarettes march and dance. Color shapes were animated in space, a process made possible through the construction of sets with a system of strings, invisible to the camera. Of particular note is his experimentation with the film's optical soundtrack, in which he used images to create sound. He designed a series of shapes in various weights and widths, which were then filmed onto the optical track so that the sound gate of the projector 'read' the sound of the image. Fischinger experienced an innate connection between sound and image that is beautifully realized in his film work.

Fischinger's influence is far reaching, perhaps more so for its ideas and sophisticated, musical visuals than for his techniques. These visuals inspired others, such as artists as diverse as Jordan Belson and Sara Petty, to divine the techniques necessary for their unique interpretations of moving forms. His work has had a broader influence, too, through the Disney film "Fantasia", which he worked on briefly and whose animation artists were shown his films as guides and inspiration as they put moving image to music.

Still from Len Lye's Free Radicals, courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation

Len Lye was born a year after Fischinger and in New Zealand. He was an extremely creative individual whose life itself has been called art. Lye is one of a few who are credited as the inventor of "direct film", a sort of cameraless filmmaking, in which the artist works directly onto the film negating the use of a camera.

This was usually necessitated by the expense of the camera. Film stock could be acquired and various media which would adhere it. Lye used dyes, stencils, and resist methods, inspired by the batik tradition of the Samoans with whom he had lived for a short while. Layers of color, shapes and lines spring to life in works such as "Colour Cry" and "Trade Tattoo". He scratched and jabbed at the dense black film leader releasing a rhythmic, gyrating white line in black space, creating "Free Radicals" and "Particles in Space".

Now more commonly referred to as "direct animation", there is a devoted group of filmmakers making films in this manner. Devon Damonte, Barbel Neubauer, and Stephanie Maxwell have all created beautiful, compelling works that have found enthusiastic audiences in film and animation festivals and other screening venues. As film stock disappears and digital cameras become the norm, workshops are included in film festivals to demonstrate this technique to new audiences. It is a practice that has acquired an almost folk art status.

Norman McLaren, a prolific and talented artist, also worked directly on film as well as utilizing numerous other techniques, many that he developed. Born in Scotland, McLaren's long tenure at the National Film Board of Canada left us with many animated treasures with the added bonus that he wrote and published notes about his process. McLaren's subject matter varied as he moved from abstract work such as "Lines Horizontal" to narrative interpretations of folk songs. He was a master of the technique referred to as pixilation, animating real people and objects in his film "Neighbors" and "A Chairy Tale", as he brilliantly illuminated social struggles and ills. This technique is still a favorite when demonstrating the principles of frame-by-frame movement because of the illusions that can be created such as a person, filmed when both feet are off of the ground in a jump, appearing to float over the ground. David Parsons adapted this strategy to dance using strobe lights, in his work "Caught," where the light is on when he is in the air and off when his feet are on the ground. The illusion is of a leaping person, floating perpetually in mid-air, in defiance of gravity.

In addition to manipulating time and physics while shooting, McLaren also employed the optical printer to superimpose images, making possible images such as the phased forms seen in "Pas de Deux". Here two dancers are sketched in luminous lines, their movements leaving a trail through space, a tracing that grows complex and again singular as the figures pause.

In one of his animations of a folk tale, "La Poulette Gris" demonstrates McLaren's finesse of drawing. Using a single board on which to draw, he draws the image then captures it on film. Drawing with a soft medium allows him to change and adjust each succeeding frame so that at the end of the filming session he has not a stack of drawings but the last drawing on the single board. What results is a metamorphosing, moving ground from which the hen, a nest and egg, the mythical sky, and a night landscape all emerge as evoked by the narrative.

This technique of using a single drawing created in an alterable soft medium has been carried on most notably in the contemporary work of William Kentridge, from South Africa whose beautiful, metamorphic drawings subtly reveal relationships, causes and effects that may simmer below the surface. Caroline Leaf ("The Street", "The Owl Who Married the Goose") is also affiliated with the National Film Board of Canada, and is renown for her work in soft media too, but instead of pastels or charcoal she has used sand and paint on glass. These techniques require an innate knowledge of timing and movement as the animation is shot – or performed – 'straight ahead' without separate drawings that can be adjusted or changed.

John Whitney, Sr. is an important artist and engineer who not only made beautiful films but also contributed to the machines and theory of created moving images. Intrigued with the idea of drawing sound onto film, just as images could be exposed to film, he and his brother James constructed a large pendulum device that controlled the amount of light which then created sound – a direct link between optics and audio. The results, as evidenced in their "Five Film Exercises" (1943-44) were a new experience of sound and visuals. The images were abstract, vibrantly colored, and the sound, unlike tradition music, was more so a series of tones, sometimes jarring.

The drive to create a system of camera movement control to produce complex patterns and effects led him to acquire and reconfigure an anti-aircraft gun controller. This system, basically an analog computer, could be programmed based on a template to control the motion of the camera so that it performed a set of instructions, which could be precisely repeated if needed. This became the basis of the motion control camera that liberated the film effects industry. The Whitney's subjects were dots of color, swirling lines and shapes which when moved in a pattern and filmed created dynamic, rhythmic graphic motion. An engaging sample of this work is seen in "Catalog" (1961), which was screened as part of The iotaCenter's Kinetica 3 program. It was also included in the more recent Visual Music exhibition at The Hirshhorn and The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, as was "Five Film Exercises" and a number of other films by John Whitney, Sr., James Whitney and a three-screen work by John Whitney, Jr.

John Whitney, Sr. also created the basis for the 'slit-scan' technique that was later used by Douglas Trumball in creating the stargate corridor sequence of "2001: A Space Odyssey". Through his company Motion Graphics Incorporated he made numerous contributions to Hollywood films, supplying effects that were previously not possible and introducing a visual aesthetic of abstracted graphics. A beautiful example of this is the title sequence of the Alfred Hitchcock thriller "Vertigo", created and executed with renowned designer Saul Bass.

While his effects were useful to Hollywood, they had a foundation in a critical and insightful conceptualization of the interplay of sound and image and the generation of these forms. This motivation led him to create the necessary machines and to write a text, "Digital Harmony", that clearly put forward his ideas and laid a basis for future artists to build on.

There are many animation artists whose thought processes, as well as technical creativity, inform the current practitioner. To give justice to this accounting, a representative few from a bountiful Eastern Europe tradition must be included – Jiri Trnka, Yuri Norstein, and Jan Svankmajer. Trnka, who died in 1969, is still revered as the master of puppet animation due to his visual style and well-crafted sets and puppets. Each of his works brings to mind a miniature theater performance, complete in its design, lighting and actors.

Norstein, born in 1941, is inspirational in the rich, imaginative layers that he creates in his narrative as well as with his imagery onscreen. Using multiple layers of glass, Norstein evokes fog, and a night forest, fire and a pastoral setting, bringing to life folk tales such as "The Fox and the Hare", and "The Heron and the Crane". "The Fox and the Hare" reflects a wonderful use of folk art as well, as panels divide the film frame much like quilt pieces, and textile-like patterns fabricate the environment. The emphasis is not on fluid, human-like movements, but rather on style, impression, and mood. His "Tale of Tales" beautifully rethinks the structure of narrative, reformulating memory with impressions, and desires.

The surrealistic vision of Jan Svankmajer stands out somewhat from his Eastern European peers. He uses objects, invested with meaning and spirit, to build his narratives, which don't always tell 'stories' but may instead convey a condition. Two clay figures, a male and a female, merge together, gouge each other's body, form and deform in an ongoing struggle to relate. Human heads made of food and objects devour and regurgitate each other. His work has inspired many contemporary artists, directly as well as the work of the Brothers Quay, whose work gives tribute to Svankmajer.

There is, of course, a long list of additional animation artists that I could include, but the above mentioned form a good basis for examining the role of invention and conceptualization. The American animation production studios should be mentioned for their technical contributions to a creative form even though they are situated in the

commercial arena, bringing animated characters and stories to the theater and later, to television. Disney's development of the multiplane camera, in which background layers on glass could be moved independently, allowed animated scenes to possess a beautiful sense of depth, and more realistic movement through space. This technique has been adopted by other studios and also by independent animators, notably in the evocative, breath-taking scenes created by Yuri Norstein. In 1914, Fleischer Studios, headed by Max Fleischer, with his brother Dave, created the technique of rotoscoping, using live action actors as the template for drawn characters, by projecting the film onto a drawing surface. This technique has been embraced by numerous computer software programs and has more recently been brought to public attention through the Richard Linklater's film "Waking Life" and "A Scanner Darkly".

The "pure" digital approach must be included here, even if in brief. It is a trajectory that warrants a separate and thorough investigation, and must be included in any discussion of animation and digital technology. Here the images and motion are created in code. A forerunner in this area is the late John Whitney, Sr. and also Larry Cuba. The work of John Simon, Jr. beautifully illustrates a current manifestation of that legacy. A number of Simon's works exist in code, displayed on a LCD with its program encased on the back of the hung panel. Accessible and non-intimidating environments, such as "Processing" created by Casey Reas and Ben Fry, offer the animator an opportunity to construct simple lines of codes, or "sketches".

The development of these processes and technologies, and more so the inspiration that necessitated the invention, informs us as we examine the continued evolution of art animation in a studio that is now dominated by digital instruments.

The contemporary studio in practice and pedagogy
New technology brings about new possibilities as noted previously with the advent of film. Video, when introduced in the late 1960's, allowed a new process and approach, which was largely not employed by animators, although its images of feedback and colorized, synthesized forms certainly added to the visual grammar of animators and other visual artists. Digital technology – software, hardware, robotics, and sensors – initially introduced to the public around the same time, continues to offer seemingly endless possibilities.

Computers, with their software programs and peripheral devices, provide a landing place for a wide variety of media – painting, drawing, clay, video, photographs, sounds, musical phrases, collage – anything that can be captured or acquired. Images, designs, sounds and music can also be created completely within the programs, never existing outside of the ever-shrinking box. Once created or acquired these elements can be manipulated in a seemingly endless number of ways via filters, effects, and paintbrushes, then layered, sequenced, and rendered into a final composition. Hand-drawn images, found objects, photocopied graphics, mix readily with 2D and 3D digital constructs. The captured sound of plucked string or struck match combines

with a digitally emitted tone. All of these things can be layered, moved, altered and manipulated in space and time.

Interesting things happen when images and sound come from a variety of media and sources. Of course, there must be a foundation of conceptualization and aesthetics to motivate the investigation.

In a classroom, as well as one's own practice, it is useful to not only have a computer and its necessary peripherals (scanner, external drives, mouse, Wacom tablet, etc.) but also workspace – a place to draw, paint, cut, scratch, sculpt or mold whatever the vision necessitates. Other tools include a light table for drawing or painting while viewing previous layers, a digital camera/camcorder for inputting and outputting stills or video, and an animation stand for shooting. And of course, a variety of software programs are available. The use of Adobe After Effects is almost mandatory as it handles layers, transparency, masking, keyframing of transformations and more and has a virtual 3D camera to simulate movement with depth on a Z-axis, as if shooting in a virtual space. Its imaging sister, Adobe Photoshop, is another essential program used for creating new visuals and manipulating, preparing acquired images. The ability to create layers, and to make layers semi-transparent offer an environment not unlike the animation light table where layers of images are drawn on paper while being able to see the image underneath in order to make the necessary changes, frame-by-frame, to create the illusion of motion.

This 'studio' approach, which includes the drawing table/workbench as well as the digital tools, combined with "out of the box' thinking where the essence and boundaries of animation are pondered, creates a sort of 'software meets thrift store' energy in the pursuit of individual expression and the innovations this may require. This dynamic can be seen in work from students in the experimental animation class offered by Virginia Commonwealth University's Kinetic Imaging program in the School of the Arts. In this class students conducted 'experiments' which challenged them to enlarge their palette of tools and processes and try new ways of making images move. They studied works of abstract animation, visual music, and performance including the works by artists previously mentioned. Older methods of creating images on film were translated into the digital environment, such as painting on glass in real time captured frame-by-frame in the computer. This rich environment then allowed easy recontextualizing of the captured images; combining it with drawn images, live action and adding sound. They then created a final project that was informed by their discoveries.

Deven Langston, in his work "Red X", combined analog with digital methods. Old, large-bulb, Christmas lights were placed in a circular formation, on a device whose speed was controlled by a rheostat. This spinning light sculpture was videotaped, and that footage was transferred to the computer. The sequence was then altered using software effects and then the playback of the piece was manipulated in 'real-time' simply through the scrubbing of the video timeline. This playback was videotaped off of the computer screen as Deven 'played' the piece.
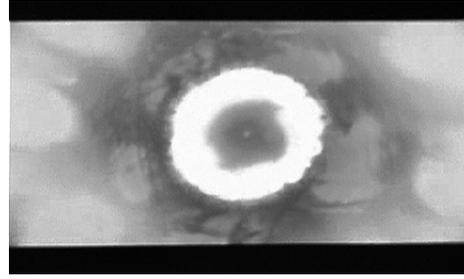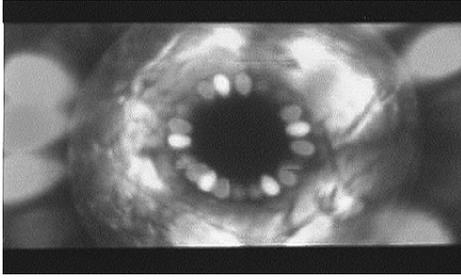
Still images from Deven Langston's "Red X".

Another student, Molly Andrews, used the idea of replacement animation where similar objects, slightly changed, are shot and placed in a sequence so that the change creates movement. This is a familiar concept in puppet animation where a part of the puppet, usually a head or hands, is made so that multiple versions of the part are available and can be placed on the puppet when needed to show change, such as a hand with a pointing finger, or a face showing surprise. Molly applied this technique to chewing gum found long discarded and hardened on sidewalks. She noted that the shapes and color were similar but at the same time unique. Using a digital camera she scoured the urban environment photographing these shapes, which she then transferred to her computer. There she sequenced the shapes, coordinating their placement and size, producing an animated rhythm of found forms.

Still image from Jordan Bruner's animation.

The love of mixed media, including video, is evident in the work of Jordan Bruner and Matt Charboneau. Bruner combines a drawn heart, with human forms on a winged creature made of collage. An arm, which originated as video, reaches into the frame, seen only as a shadow in an already dark space and pulls at the heart that eventually tumbles through space. This evocative piece has an open-ended narrative. No story is told directly. Instead quirky relationships and a psychological space are alluded to, leaving the viewer with a strong, albeit intangible, impression.

Charboneau, in his animation "Blue Sea Rose", processed Super Sculpey using a pasta mill to make organic, rose-like forms, inspired by the computer graphic visions of artist Kenneth Huff. These forms were animated using stop motion techniques and then transferred to the computer for color correction and to be placed in an environment. For the background environment, Matt referred to the light shows of the late 60's and early '70's. He videotaped colored dyes and paints being added to water, blowing on the water to create movement and bubbles. Together the undulating rose forms and slowly swirling background create an imagined, poetic space.
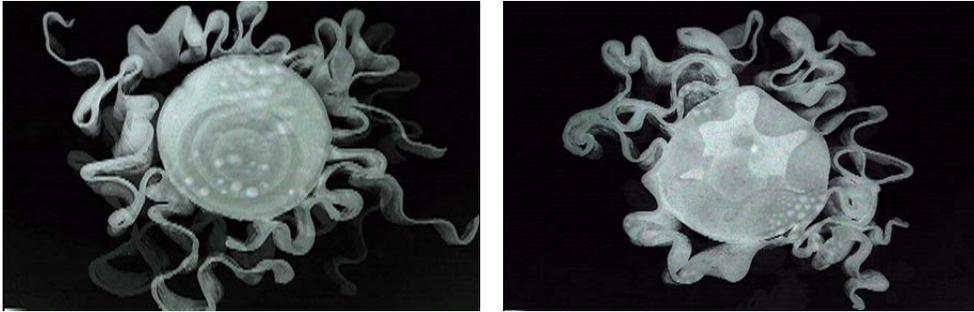
Still images from Matt Charboneau's "Blue Sea Roses".

Many other techniques were explored and translated to the computer. Erin Zerbe and Kat Padua, explored painting as animation, inspired by Caroline Leaf's "The Street", painted on backlit glass and also by Fischinger's painted ever-changing abstract constructions of "Motion Painting". Both students were attracted to the idea of recording a painting session, and also to the process of working with their hands in tangible media, while utilizing the computer. The progression of images, as previously shot on film by Fischinger and Leaf, can now be captured and sequenced via a digital camera and software programs such as iStopMotion, FrameThief, and Stop Motion Pro.

The extended trajectory of animation
As evidenced in the creative experiments that emerged in the classroom, informed by past inventions and investigations, the line between animation and 'not animation' was often brought into question and often blurred, as apparent in the work of Deven Langston. This is not unlike the blurring of boundaries long noted between film and video. How can frame-by-frame imaging be identified in a technology such as video that has no frames but instead is measured in timecode? Constantly emerging technology offers new possibilities and extensions of the form of animation. With this the ongoing dialogue of conceptualization and aesthetics in art offers new possibilities of exhibition and performance forums.

In considering these new possibilities and the question of animation in contemporary art, I look to several exhibition experiences, one being my personal experience in presenting my most recent work, "Between Frames". I am also intrigued by the work of three artists who may not be defined first and foremost as "animators" but who I think add to the dialogue revolving around animation.

"Between Frames" is most successful in the 'category' of experimental film even though it is assembled and controlled frame-by-frame. The original images, over 2500, were shot on 35mm slide film and scanned into the computer where they were rotated and sized to formulate a constructed journey through time, as one gazed at a plot of dirt in a struggling garden. In the festivals where it has shown it has been referred to as experimental film or housed with video works, even garnering an award for 'best editing'. Indeed, there is an edit between each frame and in fact the title alludes to the activity, the thinking that resides between each frame. It is interesting

that some work will be called animated film, sequences or drawings but not "animation".

The work William Kentridge, mentioned earlier in regard to his exquisite animations using drawing in soft media, greatly illuminates this point. His work, which includes drawings, video and projections, has been exhibited in many international forums, museums and galleries including the 2005 Venice Biennale. There he gave tribute to George Méliès an early pioneer in narrative, film work that made use of drawing and frame-by-frame shooting of real people and objects. It is noted that when reading reviews, critical texts, or simply descriptions of Kentridge's work it is usually referred to as 'drawings in time' or film – at best animated film – but rarely as "animation". It makes one wonder what stigma the visual art world feels is attached to the term animation.

Two other contemporary artists whose work can be examined in considering the form and boundaries of animation are Oscar Muñoz and Jim Campbell.

Oscar Muñoz also had his artwork included in the 2005 Venice exhibition. His "Proyecto para un Memorial (Project for a Memorial)" throws an interesting light on the shape and limits of images created in time. In this piece, Muñoz draws with water on a stone-like surface. He is drawing the face of a missing person, a condition that is illustrated by the ephemeral visage that quickly begins to evaporate, disappearing as it is yet being drawn. These are images drawn in time, one by one, as the spectator via video, observes. The opposing forces of water and the air give and take the illusion of existence. We see these images, appearing and disappearing, the created and the creator in a poignant exchange. Now the dialogue is no longer humorous as in the early 'Enchanted Drawings' of Blackton, the intent is not to entertain but instead to illuminate and reveal, not unlike a poem.

Jim Campbell, an artist and engineer, creates work that also displays sophisticated observation and introspection, elegantly utilizing electronic devices as his intermediary. Like the work of Muñoz, his series "Memory Works" brings us to that space of inquiry as to what is and is not animation. His "Photo of My Mother" is an image of the artist's mother, which is at moments fuzzy and undefined and then is brought into focus. The agent of changing the image's clarity is Campbell's breathing, which was digitally recorded. A companion piece to this is "Portrait of My Father" in which the image of his father appears and disappears, as dictated by the recorded beating of Campbell's heart. In these two artworks, the digital image has two states, analogous to keyframes in animation. The movement from state to state is determined by the actions and decisions of the artist – not through his hand but by his breath and the beating of his heart.

While certainly not considered "animation" in the traditional, accepted sense of the term, the manipulation of the individual image, and the clear conceptualization around these works can add a critical note to the ongoing, and evolving practice of animation.

In closing…
The term "animation" encompasses much more than the popular forms put forward for entertainment. The use of animated images is changing, permeating art as well as commercial venues and its acceptance as an art form speaks to the wide gamut of possible imaging mechanisms available to artists. The inventive legacy of the preceding generation of animators, combined with the many possibilities offered by constantly emerging technologies, informed by the on-going conceptual dialogue of art affords a rich postmodern mix of creative strategies. Performance, installation, projection, single-channel monitors and boxes hung on a wall – all are possibilities for the exhibition and screening of the independent art animation.

Resources:
Gregory Barsamian
http://www.gregorybarsamian.com/LoadFlash.html

Library of Congress – Origins of American Animation
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/oahtml/oahome.html

Kathy Rose http://www.krose.com

J. Walt Adamczyk http://www.johnadamczyk.com/

Oskar Fischinger Archive http://www.oskarfischinger.org/

Len Lye http://www.govettb.org.nz/lenlye/
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